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Wilson, John

THE WORKS

OF

PROFESSOR WILSON

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

EDITED BY HIS SON-IN-LAW

PROFESSOR FERRIER

VOL. XI.

TALES

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
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TALES

BY

PROFESSOR WILSON

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF SCOTTISH LIFE

TRIALS OF MARGARET LYNDSAY

THE FORESTERS

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
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LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF SCOTTISH LIFE.

TO

SIR WALTER SCOTT, BARONET,

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED,

WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF ESTEEM AND ADMIRATION,

BY HIS OBLIGED FRIEND

THE AUTHOR.

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LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

OF

SCOTTISH LIFE.

THE LILY OF LIDDISDALE.

The Country all around rang with the beauty of Amy Gordon; and, although it was not known who first bestowed upon her the appellation, yet now she bore no other than the Lily of Liddisdale. She was the only child of a shepherd, and herself a shepherdess. Never had she been out of the valley in which she was born; but many had come from the neighbouring districts just to look upon her as she rested with her flock on the hill-side, as she issued smiling from her father's door, or sat in her serener loveliness in the kirk on Sabbath-day. Sometimes there are living beings in nature as beautiful as in romance; reality surpasses imagination; and we see breathing, brightening, and moving before our eyes, sights dearer to our hearts than any we ever beheld in the land of sleep.

It was thus that all felt who looked on the Lily of Liddisdale. She had grown up under the dews, and breath, and light of heaven, among the solitary hills; and now that she had attained to perfect womanhood, nature rejoiced in the beauty that gladdened the stillness of these undisturbed glens. Why should this one maiden have been created lovelier than all others? In what did her surpassing loveliness consist? None could tell; for had the most imaginative poet described this maiden, something that floated around her, an air of felt, but unspeakable grace and lustre, would have been wanting in his picture. Her face was pale, yet tinged with such a faint and leaf-like crimson, that though she well deserved the name of the Lily, yet was she at times also like unto the Rose. When asleep, or in silent thought, she was like the fairest of all the lilied brood; but when gliding along the braes, or singing her songs by the river-side, she might well remind one of that other brighter and more dazzling

Flower. Amy Gordon knew that she was beautiful. She knew it from the eyes that in delight met hers, from the tones of so many gentle voices, from words of affection from the old, and love from the young, from the sudden smile that met her when, in the morning, she tied up at the little mirror her long raven hair, and from the face and figure that looked up to her when she stooped to dip her pitcher in the clear mountain-well. True that she was of lowly birth, and that her manners were formed in a shepherd's hut, and among shepherdesses on the hill. But one week passed in the halls of the highly born would have sufficed to hide the little graceful symptoms of her humble lineage, and to equal her in elegance with those whom in beauty she had far excelled. The sun and the rain had indeed touched her hands, but nature had shaped them delicate and small. Light were her footsteps upon the verdant turf, and through the birchwood glades and down the rocky dells she glided or bounded along, with a beauty that seemed at once native and alien there, like some creature of another clime that still had kindred with this—an Oriental antelope among the roes of a Scottish forest.

Amy Gordon had reached her nineteenth summer—and as yet she knew of love only as she had read of it in old Border songs and ballads. These ancient ditties were her delight—and her silent soul was filled with wild and beautiful traditions. In them love seemed, for the most part, something sad, and, whether prosperous or unhappy, alike terminating in tears. In them the young maiden was spoken of as dying in her prime, of fever, consumption, or a pining heart; and her lover, a gallant warrior, or a peaceful shepherd, killed in battle, or perishing in some midnight storm. In them, too, were sometimes heard blessed voices whispering affection beneath the greenwood tree, or among the shattered cliffs overgrown with light-waving trees in some long, deep, solitary glen. To Amy Gordon, as she chanted to herself, in the blooming or verdant desert, all these various traditionary lays, love seemed a kind of beautiful superstition belonging to the memory of the dead. With such tales she felt a sad and pleasant sympathy; but it was as with something far remote—although at times the music of her own voice, as it gave an affecting expression to feelings embodied in such artless words, touched a chord within her heart, that dimly told her that heart might one day have its own peculiar and overwhelming love.

The Summer that was now shining had been calm and sunny beyond the memory of the oldest shepherd. Never had nature seemed so delightful to Amy's eyes and to Amy's heart; and never had she seemed so delightful to the eyes and the hearts of all who beheld her with her flock. Often would she wreathe the sprigs of heather round her raven ringlets, till her dark hair was brightened with a galaxy of richest blossoms. Or dishevelling her tresses, and letting fall from them that shower of glowing and balmy pearls, she would bind them up again in simpler braiding, and fix on the silken folds two or three water-lilies, large, massy, and whiter than the snow. Necklaces did she wear in her playful glee, of the purple fruit that feeds the small birds in the moors, and beautiful was the

gentle stain then visible over the blue veins of her milk-white breast. So were floating by the days of her nineteenth summer among the hills. The evenings she spent by the side of her grey-headed father—and the old man was blessed. Her nights passed in a world of gentle dreams.

But, though Amy Gordon knew not yet what it was to love, she was herself the object of as deep, true, tender, and passionate love, as ever swelled and kindled within a human breast. Her own cousin, Walter Harden, now lived and would have died for her; but had not hitherto ventured to tell his passion. He was a few years older than her, and had long loved her with the gentle purity of a brother's affection. Amy had no brother of her own, and always called Walter Harden by that endearing name. That very name of brother had probably so familiarised her heart towards him, that never had she thought of him, even for a single moment, in any other light. But, although he too called Amy sister, his heart burned with other feelings, and he must win her to be his bride, and possess her as his wife, or die. When she was a mere child he had led her by the hand—when a fair girl he had in his arms lifted her across the swollen burns, and over the snow-drifts—now that she was a woman he had looked on her in silence, but with a soul overcharged with a thousand thoughts, hopes, and desires, which he feared to speak of to her ear; for he knew, and saw, and felt, in sorrow, that she loved him but as a brother. He knew, however, that she loved none else; and in that—and that alone—was his hope,—so he at last determined to woo the Lily of Liddisdale, and win her, in her beauty and fragrance, to bloom within his house.

The Lily was sitting alone in a deep hollow among the hills, with her sheep and lambs pasturing or playing around her, while over that little secluded circle a single hawk was hanging far up in the sky. She was glad, but not surprised, to see her brother standing beside her; and when he sat down by her side and took her hand into his, she looked up with a gentle smile, and asked if he was going upon business further on among the hills. Walter Harden instantly poured forth, in a torrent, the passion of his soul, beseeched her not to shut up her sweet bosom against him, but to promise to become, before summer was over, his wedded wife. He spoke with fervour but trepidation—kissed her cheek—and then awaited, with a fast-throbbing and palpitating heart, his Amy's reply.

There was no guile—no art—no hypocrisy, in the pure and happy heart of the Lily of Liddisdale. She took not away her hand from that of him who pressed it—she rose not up from the turf, although her gentle side just touched his heart—she turned not away her face so beautiful—nor changed the silvery sweetness of her speech. Walter Harden was such a man, as in a war of freemen defending their mountains against a tyrant, would have advanced his plume in every scene of danger, and have been chosen a leader among his pastoral compeers. Amy turned her large beaming hazel eyes upon his face, and saw that it was overshadowed. There was something in its expression too sad and solemn, mingling with the flush of hope

and passion, to suffer her, with playful or careless words, to turn away from herself the meaning of what she had heard. Her lover saw in her kind, but unagitated silence, that to him she was but a sister; and, rising to go, he said, "Blessed be thou all the days of thy life—farewell—my sweet Amy—farewell!"

But they did not thus part. They walked together on the lonely hill-side—down the banks of the little wimpling burn,—and then out of one small glen into another, and their talk was affectionate and kind. Amy heard him speak of feelings to her unknown, and almost wondered that she could be so dear to him, so necessary to his life, as he passionately vowed. Nor could such vows be unpleasant to her ear, uttered by that manly voice, and enforced by the silent speech of those bold but gentle eyes. She concealed nothing from him, but frankly confessed, that hitherto she had looked upon him even as her own father's son. "Let us be happy, Walter, as we have been so long. I cannot marry you—oh—no—no; but since you say it would kill you if I married another, then I swear to you by all that is sacred—yes, by the Bible on which we have often read together, and by yonder sun setting over the Windhead, that you never will see that day." Walter Harden was satisfied; he spoke of love and marriage no more; and in the sweet, fresh, airless, and dewy quiet of evening, they walked together down into the inhabited vale, and parted, almost like brother and sister, as they had been used to do for so many happy years.

Soon after this, Amy was sent by her father to the Priory, the ancient seat of the Elliots, with some wicker baskets which they had made for the young ladies there. A small plantation of willows was in the corner of the meadow in which their cottage stood, and from them the old shepherd and his daughter formed many little articles of such elegance and ingenuity, that they did not seem out of place even in the splendid rooms of the Priory. Amy had slung some of these pieces of rural workmanship round her waist, while some were hanging on her arms, and thus she was gliding along a footpath through the old elm-woods that shelter the Priory, when she met young George Elliot, the heir of that ancient family, going out with his angle to the river-side. The youth, who had but a short time before returned from England, where he had been for several years, knew at the first glance that the fair creature before him could be no other than the Lily of Liddisdale. With the utmost gentleness and benignity he called her by that name, and after a few words of courtesy, he smilingly asked her for one small flower-basket to keep for her sake. He unloosened one from her graceful waist, and with that liberty which superior rank justified, but, at the same time, with that tenderness which an amiable mind prompted, he kissed her fair forehead, and they parted—she to the Priory, and he down to the Linn at the Cushat-wood.

Never had the Boy beheld a creature so perfectly beautiful. The silence and the songs of morning were upon the dewy woods, when that vision rose before him—his soul was full of the joy of youth—and when Amy disappeared, he wondered how he could have parted

so soon—in a few moments—from that bright and beaming Dryad. Smiles had been in her eyes and round her pearly teeth while they spoke together, and he remembered the soft and fragrant lock of hair that touched his lips as he gently kissed her forehead. The beauty of that living creature sank into his soul along with all the sweet influences of nature, now rejoicing in the full, ripe, rich spirit of Summer, and in fancy he saw that Lily springing up in every glade through which he was now roaming, and when he had reached the Linn, on the bank too of every romantic nook and bay where the clear waters eddied or slept. "She must recross the bridge on her way home," said the enamoured Boy to himself; and, fearing that Amy Gordon might already be returning from the Priory, he clambered up the face of the shrubby precipice, and, bounding over the large green mossy stones, and through the entangling briers and brushwood, he soon was at the Bridge, and sat down on a high bank, under a cliff, commanding a view of the path by which the fair maiden must approach on her homeward journey.

The heart of the innocent Amy had fluttered, too, as the tall, slim, graceful stripling had kissed her brow. No rudeness—no insult—no pride—no haughty freedom had been in his demeanour towards her; but she felt gladly conscious in her mind, that he had been delighted with her looks, and would, perhaps, think now and then afterwards, as he walked through the woods, of the shepherd's daughter, with whom he had not disdained to speak. Amy thought, while she half looked back, as he disappeared among the trees, that he was just such a youth as the old minstrels sang of in their war or love ballads—and that he was well worthy some rich and noble bride, whom he might bring to his Hall on a snow-white palfrey with silken reins, and silver bells on its mane. And she began to recite to herself, as she walked along, one of those old Border tales.

Amy left her baskets at the Priory, and was near the Bridge, on her return, when she beheld the young Heir spring down from the bank before her, and come forward with a sparkling countenance. "I must have that sweet tress that hangs over thy sweeter forehead," said he, with a low and eager voice, "and I will keep it for the sake of the fairest Flower that ever bloomed in my father's woods—even the Lily of Liddisdale." The lock was given—for how could it be refused? And the shepherdess saw the young and high-born Heir of the priory put it into his breast. She proceeded across the hill—down the long Falcon-glen—and through the Witch-wood—and still he was by her side. There was a charm in his speech—and in every word he said—and in his gentle demeanour—that touched poor Amy's very heart; and, as he gave her assistance, although all unneeded, over the uneven hollows, and the springs and marshes, she had neither the courage, nor the wish, nor the power, to request him to turn back to the Priory. They entered a small quiet green circlet, bare of trees, in the bosom of a coppice-wood; and the youth, taking her hand, made her sit down on the mossy trunk of a fallen yew, and said: "Amy—my fair Amy—before we part—will you sing me one of your old Border songs? and let it be one of love. Did not the sons

of Nobles, long ago, often love the daughters of them that dwelt in huts?"

Amy Gordon sat there an hour with the loving, but honourable Boy, and sang many a plaintive tune, and recited many a romantic story. She believed every word she uttered, whether of human lovers, or of the affection of fairies, the silent creatures of the woods and knowes, towards our race. For herself, she felt a constant wild delight in fictions, which to her were all as truths; and she was glad and proud to see how they held in silent attention him at whose request she recited or sang. But now she sprang to her feet, and beseeching him to forgive the freedom she had used in thus venturing to speak so long in such a presence, but at the same time remembering that a lock of her hair was near his heart, and perceiving that the little basket she had let him take was half filled with wildflowers, the Lily of Liddisdale made a graceful obeisance, and disappeared. Nor did the youth follow her—they had sat together for one delightful hour—and he returned by himself to the Priory.

From this day the trouble of a new delight was in the heart of young Elliot. The spirit of innocence was blended with that of beauty all over Amy, the Shepherdess; and it was their perfect union that the noble boy so dearly loved. Yet what could she be to him more than a gleam of rainbow light—a phantom of the woods—an imagination that passed away into the silence of the far-off green pastoral hills? She belonged almost to another world—another life. His dwelling, and that of his forefathers, was a princely Hall. She, and all her nameless line, were dwellers in turf-built huts. "In other times," thought he, "I might have transplanted that Lily into mine own garden; but these are foolish fancies! Am I in love with poor Amy Gordon, the daughter of a Shepherd?" As these thoughts were passing through his mind, he was bounding along a ridge of hills, from which many a sweet vale was visible; and he formed a sudden determination to visit the cottage of Amy's father, which he had seen some years ago pointed out when he was with a gay party of lords and ladies, on a visit to the ruins of Hermitage Castle. He bounded like a deer along; and as he descended into a little vale, lo! on a green mound, the Lily of Liddisdale herding her sheep!

Amy was half terrified to see him standing in his graceful beauty before her in that solitary place. In a moment her soul was disquieted within her, and she felt that it indeed was love. She wished that she might sink into that verdant mound, from which she vainly strove to rise, as the impassioned youth lay down on the turf at her side, and telling her to fear nothing, called her by a thousand tender and endearing names. Never, till he had seen Amy, had he felt one tremor of love; but now his heart was kindled, and in that utter solitude, where all was so quiet and so peaceful, there seemed to him a preternatural charm over all her character. He burst out into passionate vows and prayers, and called God to witness, that if she would love him, he would forget all distinction of rank, and marry his beautiful Amy, and she should live yet in his own Hall. The words were uttered, and there was silence. Their echo sounded for a

moment strange to his own ears; but he fixed his soul upon her countenance, and repeated them over and over again with wilder emphasis, and more impassioned utterance. Amy was confounded with fear and perplexity; but when she saw him kneeling before her, the meek, innocent, humble girl could not endure the sight, and said, "Sir, behold in me one willing to be your servant. Yes, willing is poor Amy Gordon to kiss your feet. I am a poor man's daughter—Oh! sir, you surely came not hither for evil? No—no—evil dwells not in such a shape. Away then—away then—my noble master—for if Walter Harden were to see you!—if my old father knew this, his heart would break!"

Once more they parted. Amy returned home in the evening at the usual hour; but there was no peace now for her soul. Such intense and passionate love had been vowed to her—such winning and delightful expressions whispered into her heart by one so far above her in all things, but who felt no degradation in equalling her to him in the warmth and depth of his affection, that she sometimes strove to think it all but one of her wild dreams awakened by some verse or incident in some old ballad. But she had felt his kisses on her cheek—his thrilling voice was in her soul—and she was oppressed with a passion, pure it is true, and most innocently humble, but a passion that seemed to be like life itself, never to be overcome, and that could cease only when the heart he had deluded—for what else than delusion could it be?—ceased to beat. Thus agitated, she had directed her way homewards with hurried and heedless steps. She minded not the miry pits—the quivering marshes—and the wet rushy moors. Instead of crossing the little sinuous moorland streams at their narrow places, where her light feet used to bound across them, she waded through them in her feverish anxiety, and sometimes, after hurrying along the braes, she sat suddenly down, breathless, weak, and exhausted, and retraced in weeping bewilderment all the scene of fear, joy, endearments, caresses, and wild persuasions, from which she had torn herself away, and escaped. On reaching home, she went to her bed trembling and shivering, and drowned in tears—and could scarcely dare, much as she needed comfort, even to say her prayers.—Amy was in a high fever—during the night she became delirious—and her old father sat by her bedside till morning, fearing that he was going to lose his child.

There was grief over the great Strath and all its glens, when the rumour spread over them that Amy Gordon was dying. Her wonderful beauty had but given a tenderer and brighter character to the love which her unsullied innocence and simple goodness had universally inspired; and it was felt, even among the sobbings of a natural affection, that if the Lily of Liddisdale should die, something would be taken away of which they were all proud, and from whose lustre there was a diffusion over their own lives. Many a gentle hand touched the closed door of her cottage, and many a low voice inquired how God was dealing with her—but where now was Walter Harden when his Lily was like to fade? He was at her bed's foot, as her Father was at its head. Was she not his sister, although she would

not be his bride? And when he beheld her glazed eyes wandering unconsciously in delirium, and felt her blood throbbing so rapidly in her beautiful transparent veins, he prayed to God that Amy might recover, even although her heart were never to be his, even although it were to fly to the bosom of him whose name she constantly kept repeating in her wandering fantasies. For Amy, although she sometimes kindly whispered the name of Walter Harden, and asked why her brother came not to see her on her deathbed, yet far oftener spake beseechingly and passionately as if to that other Youth, and implored him to break not the heart of a poor simple Shepherdess who was willing to kiss his feet.

Neither the Father of poor Amy nor Walter Harden had known before that she had ever seen young George Elliot—but they soon understood, from the innocent distraction of her speech, that the noble Boy had left pure the Lily he loved, and Walter said, that it belonged not to that line ever to injure the helpless. Many a pang it gave him, no doubt, to think that his Amy's heart, which all his life-long tenderness could not win, had yielded itself up in tumultuous joy to one—two—three meetings of an hour, or perhaps, only a few minutes, with one removed so high and so far from her humble life and all its concerns. These were cold sickening pangs of humiliation and jealousy, that might, in a less generous nature, have crushed all love. But it was not so with him; and cheerfully would Walter Harden have taken the burning fever into his own veins, so that it could have been removed from hers—cheerfully would he have laid down his own manly head on that pillow, so that Amy could have lifted up her long raven tresses, now often miserably dishevelled in her raving, and, braiding them once more, walk out well and happy into the sunshine of the beautiful day, rendered more beautiful still by her presence. Hard would it have been to have resigned her bosom to any human touch; but hideous seemed it beyond all thought to resign it to the touch of death. Let Heaven but avert that doom, and his affectionate soul felt that it could be satisfied.

Out of a long deep trance-like sleep Amy at last awoke, and her eyes fell upon the face of Walter Harden. She regarded long and earnestly its pitying and solemn expression, then pressed her hand to her forehead and wept. "Is my father dead and buried—and did he die of grief and shame for his Amy? Oh! that needed not have been, for I am innocent. Neither, Walter, have I broken, nor will I ever break, my promise unto thee. I remember it well—by the Bible—and yon setting sun. But I am weak and faint—Oh! tell me, Walter! all that has happened! Have I been ill—for hours—or for days—or weeks—or months? For that I know not,—so wild and so strange, so sad and so sorrowful, so miserable and so wretched, have been my many thousand dreams!"

There was no concealment and no disguise. Amy was kindly and tenderly told by her father and her brother all that she had uttered, as far as they understood it, during her illness. Nor had the innocent creature anything more to tell. Her soul was after the fever

calm, quiet, and happy. The form, voice, and shape of that beautiful Youth were to her little more now than the words and the sights of a dream. Sickness and decay had brought her spirit back to all the humble and tranquil thoughts and feelings of her lowly life. In the woods, and among the hills, that bright and noble being had for a time touched her senses, her heart, her soul, and her imagination. All was new, strange, stirring, overwhelming, irresistible, and paradise to her spirit. But it was gone—and might it stay away for ever, so she prayed, as her kind brother lifted up her head with his gentle hand, and laid it down as gently on the pillow he had smoothed. "Walter! I will be your wife! for thee my affection is calm and deep,—but that other—Oh! that was only a passing dream!" Walter leaned over her and kissed her pale lips. "Yes! Walter," she continued, "I once promised to marry none other—but now I promise to marry thee — if indeed God will forgive me for such words, lying as I am perhaps on my deathbed. I utter them to make you happy. If I live, life will be dear to me only for thy sake—if I die, walk thou along with my father at the coffin's head, and lay thine Amy in the mould. I am the Lily of Liddisdale,—you know that was once the vain creature's name!—and white, pale, and withered enough indeed is, I trow, the poor Lily now!"

Walter Harden heard her affectionate words with a deep delight, but he determined in his soul not to bind Amy down to these promises, sacred and fervent as they were, if, on her complete recovery, he discovered that they originated in gratitude, and not in love. From pure and disinterested devotion of spirit did he watch the progress of her recovery, nor did he ever allude to young Elliot but in terms of respect and admiration. Amy had expressed her surprise that he had never come to inquire how she was during her illness, and added with a sigh, "Love at first sight cannot be thought to last long. Yet surely he would have wept to hear that I was dead." Walter then told her that he had been hurried away to France, the very day after she had seen him, to attend the deathbed of his father, and had not yet returned to Scotland—but that the Ladies of the Priory had sent a messenger to know how she was every day, and that to their kindness were owing many of the conveniences she had enjoyed. Poor Amy was glad to hear that she had no reason to think the noble Boy would have neglected her in her illness; and she could not but look with pride upon her lover, who was not afraid to vindicate the character of one who she had confessed had been but too dear to her only a few weeks ago. This generosity and manly confidence on the part of her cousin quite won and subdued her heart, and Walter Harden never approached her now without awakening in her bosom something of that delightful agitation and troubled joy which her simple heart had first suffered in the presence of her young noble lover. Amy was in love with Walter almost as much as he was with her, and the names of brother and sister, pleasant as they had ever been, were now laid aside.

Amy Gordon rose from her sickbed, and even as the flower whose

name she bore, did she again lift up her drooping head beneath the dews and the sunshine. Again did she go to the hill-side, and sit and sing beside her flock. But Walter Harden was oftener with her than before, and ere the harvest moon should hang her mild, clear, unhaloed orb over the late reapers on the upland grain-fields, had Amy promised that she would become his wife. She saw him now in his own natural light—the best, the most intelligent, the most industrious, and the handsomest shepherd over all the hills; and when it was known that there was to be a marriage between Walter Harden and Amy Gordon, none felt surprised, although some, sighing, said, it was seldom, indeed, that Fortune so allowed those to wed whom nature had united.

The Lily of Liddisdale was now bright and beautiful as ever, and was returning homewards by herself from the far-off hills during one rich golden sunset, when, in a dark hollow, she heard the sound of horses' feet, and in an instant young George Elliot was at her side. Amy's dream was over—and she looked on the beautiful youth with an unquaking heart. "I have been far away—Amy—across the seas. My Father, you may have heard of it, was ill—and I attended his bed. I loved him, Amy,—I loved my Father—but he is dead!" and here the noble youth's tears fell fast—"Nothing now, but the world's laugh prevents me making you my wife—yes—my wife, sweetest Lily—and what care I for the world? for thou art both earth and heaven to me."

The impetuous, ardent, and impassioned Boy scarcely looked in Amy's face—he remembered her confusion, her fears, her sighs, her tears, his half-permitted kisses, his faintly repelled embraces, and all his suffered endearments of brow, lip, and cheek, in that solitary dell; so with a powerful arm he lifted her upon another steed, which, till now, she had scarcely observed—other horsemen seemed to the frightened, and speechless, and motionless maiden to be near—and away they went over the smooth turf like the wind, till her eyes were blind with the rapid flight, and her head dizzy. She heard kind words whispering in her ear; but Amy, since that fever, had never been so strong as before, and her high-blooded palfrey was now carrying her fleetly away over hill and hollow in a swoon.

At last she seemed to be falling down from a height, but softly, as if borne on the wings of the air; and as her feet touched the ground, she knew that young Elliot had taken her from that fleet courser, and looking up, she saw that she was in a wood of old shadowy trees of gigantic size, perfectly still, and far away from all known dwellings both on hill and plain. But a cottage was before her, and she and young Elliot were on the green in its front. It was thickly covered with honeysuckle, and moss-roses that hung their beautiful full-blown shining lamps high as the thatched roof—and Amy's soul sickened at the still, secluded, lovely, and lonely sight. "This shall be our bridal abode," whispered her lover into her ear, with panting breath. "Fear me not—distrust me not—I am not base—but my love to thee is tender and true. Soon shall

we be married—ay—this very evening must thou be mine—and may the hand that now clasps thy sweet waist wither, and the tongue that woos thee be palsied, if ever I cease to love thee as my Amy—my Lily—my wedded wife!"

The wearied and half-fainting maiden could as yet make no reply. The dream that she had believed was gone for ever now brightened upon her in the intense light of reality, and it was in her power to become the wife of him for whom she had, in the innocence and simplicity of her nature, once felt a consuming passion that had brought her to the brink of the grave. His warm breath was on her bosom—words charged with bewitching persuasion went thrilling through her heart-strings—and if she had any pride (and what human heart has it not?) it might well mingle now with love, and impel her into the embrace that was now open to clasp her close to a burning heart.

A stately and beautiful lady came smiling from the cottage door, and Amy knew that it was the sister of Elliot, and kneeled down before her. Last time the shepherdess had seen that lady it was when, with a fearful step, she took her baskets into the hall, and blushing, scarcely lifted up her eyes, when she and her high-born sisters deigned to commend her workmanship, and whisper to each other that the Lily of Liddisdale deserved her name. "Amy," said she, with a gentle voice, as she took her hand, "Amy Gordon!—my brother loves you—and he has won me to acknowledge you as my sister. I can deny my brother nothing—and his grief has brought low the pride—perhaps the foolish pride, of my heart. Will you marry him, Amy? Will you, the daughter of a poor shepherd, marry the young heir of the Priory, and the descendant, Amy, of a noble race? Amy—I see that thou art beautiful—I know that thou art good—may God and my mother forgive me this, but my sister must thou be—behold, my brother is at his shepherdess's feet!"

Amy Gordon had now nothing to fear. That sweet, young, pure, noble Lady was her friend—and she felt persuaded now that in good truth young Elliot wished to make her his wife. Might she indeed live the Lady of the Priory—be a sister to these beautiful creatures—dwell among those ancient woods—and all those spacious lawns and richest gardens—and might she be, not in a dream, but in living reality, the wife of him on whose bosom her heart had died with joy in that lonely dell, and love him and yield him her love even unto the very hour till she was dead? Such changes of estate had been long ago, and sung of in many a ballad; and was she to be the one maiden of millions, the one born in hundreds of years, to whom this blessed lot was to befall? But these thoughts passed on and away like sun-rays upon a stream; the cloud, not a dark one, of reality returned over her. She thought of Walter Harden, and in an instant her soul was fixed; nor from that instant could it be shaken by terror or by love, by the countenance of death, or the countenance, far more powerful than of death, that of the Youth before her, pale and flushed alternately with the fluctuations of many passions.

Amy felt in her soul the collected voice, as it were, of many happy and humble years among her hills, and that told her not to forsake her own natural life. The Flower that lived happily and beautifully in its own secluded nook by the side of the lonely tarn or torrent, might lose much both of its fragrance and its lustre, when transplanted into a richer soil and more sheltered bed. Could she forget for ever her father's ingle—the earthen floor—its simple furniture of day and night? Could she forget all the familiar places round about the hut where she was born? And if she left them all, and was taken up even in the arms of love into another sphere of life, would not that be the same as, or worse than to forget them, and would it not be sacrilege to the holiness of the many Sabbath nights on which she had sat at her widowed father's knees? Yet might such thoughts have been destroyed in her beating heart by the whispered music of young Elliot's eloquent and impassioned voice. But Walter Harden, though ignorant of her present jeopardy, seemed to stand before her, and she remembered his face when he sat beside her dying bed, his prayers over her when he thought she slept, and their oaths of fidelity mutually sworn before the great God.

"Will you, my noble and honoured Master, suffer me, all unworthy as I am to be yours, to leave your bosom? Sir, I am too miserable about you, to pretend to feel any offence, because you will not let me go. I might well be proud of your love, since, indeed it happens so that you do love me; but let me kneel down at your beautiful sister's feet, for to her I may be able to speak—to you I feel that it may not be, for humble am I, although unfortunately I have found favour in your eyes."

The agitated youth released Amy from his arms, and she flung herself down upon her knees before that lovely lady.

"Lady! hear me speak—a simple uneducated girl of the hills, and tell me if you would wish to hear me break an oath sworn upon the Bible, and so to lose my immortal soul? So have I sworn to be the wife of Walter Harden—the wife of a poor shepherd; and, lady, may I be on the left hand of God at the great judgment-day, if ever I be forsworn. I love Walter Harden. Do you counsel me to break his kind, faithful heart? Oh, sir! my noble young master! how dare a creature such as I to speak so freely to your beautiful sister? how dare I keep my eyes open when you are at your servant's feet? Oh, sir—had I been born a lady, I would have lived—died for you—gone with you all over the world—all over the sea, and all the islands of the sea. I would have sighed, wept, and pined away, till I had won your love—for your love would have been a blessed thing—that do I well know from the few moments you stooped to let your heart beat against the bosom of a low-born shepherdess. Even now—dearly as I love Walter Harden—fain would I lay me down and die upon this daisied green, and be buried beneath it, rather than that poor Amy Gordon should affect the soul of her young master thus; for never saw I, and never can I again see, a youth so beautiful, so winning, so overwhelming to a maiden's heart, as he before whom I now implore permission to grovel in the dust.

Send me away—spurn me from you—let me crawl away out of your presence—I can find my way back to my father's house."

It might have been a trying thing to the pride of this high-minded and high-born youth, to be refused in marriage by the daughter of one of his poorest shepherds; so would it have been had he loved less; but all pride was extinguished, and so seemed for ever and ever the light of this world's happiness. To plead further, he felt was in vain. Her soul had been given to another, and the seal of an oath set upon it, never to be broken but by the hand of death. So he lifted her up in his arms, kissed her madly a hundred times, cheek, brow, neck, and bosom, and then rushed into the woods. Amy followed him with her streaming eyes, and then turned again towards the beautiful lady, who was sobbing audibly for her brother's sake.

"Oh! weep not, Lady! that I, poor Amy Gordon, have refused to become the wife of your noble brother. The time will come, and soon too, when he and you, and your fair sisters and your stately mother, will all be thankful that I yielded not to entreaties that would then have brought disgrace upon your house! Never—never would your mother have forgiven you—and as for me, would not she have wished me dead and buried rather than the bride of her only and darling son? You know that, simple and innocent as I am, I now speak but the truth, and how, then, could your noble brother have continued to love me, who had brought dishonour, and disagreement, and distraction, among those who are now all so dear to one another! O yes—yes—he would soon have hated poor Amy Gordon, and, without any blame, perhaps broken my heart, or sent me away from the Priory back to my father's hut. Blessed be God, that all this evil has not been wrought by me! all—all—will soon be as before."

She to whom Amy thus fervently spoke felt that her words were not wholly without truth. Nor could she help admiring the noble, heroic, and virtuous conduct of this poor shepherdess, whom all this world's temptations would have failed to lure from the right path. Before this meeting she had thought of Amy as far her inferior, indeed, and it was long before her proper pride had yielded to the love of her brother, whose passion she feared might otherwise have led to some horrible catastrophe. Now that he had fled from them in distraction, this terror again possessed her,—and she whispered it to the pale trembling shepherdess.

"Follow him—follow him—gentle lady, into the wood—lose not a moment—call upon him by name—and that sweet voice must bring him back. But fear not—he is too good to do evil—fear not—receive my blessing—and let me return to my father's hut—it is but a few miles, and that distance is nothing to one who has lived all her life among the hills. My poor father will think I have died in some solitary place."

The lady wept to think that she, whom she had been willing to receive as a sister, should return all by herself so many miles at night to a lonely hut. But her soul was sick with fear for her brother—

so she took from her shoulders a long rich Indian silk scarf of gorgeous colours, and throwing it over Amy's figure, said, "Fair creature and good, keep this for my sake—and now farewell!" She gazed on the Lily for a moment in delighted wonder at her graceful beauty, as she bent on one knee, enrobed in that unwonted garb, and then, rising up, gathered the flowing drapery around her, and disappeared.

"God in his infinite mercy be praised!" cried Walter Harden, as he and the old man, who had been seeking Amy for hours all over the hills, saw the Lily gliding towards them up a little narrow dell, covered from head to foot with the splendid raiment that shone in a soft shower of moonlight. Joy and astonishment for a while held them speechless—but they soon knew all that had happened; and Walter Harden lifted her up in his arms and carried her home, exhausted now and faint with fatigue and trepidation, as if she were but a lamb rescued from a snow-wreath.

Next moon was that which the reapers love—and before it had waned Amy slept in the bosom of her husband, Walter Harden. Years passed on—and other flowers besides the Lily of Liddisdale were blooming in his house. One summer evening, when the shepherd, his fair wife, and their children, were sitting together on the green before the door, enjoying probably the sight and the noise of the imps much more than the murmurs of the sylvan Liddal, which perhaps they did not hear, a gay cavalcade rode up to the cottage, and a noble-looking young man, dismounting from his horse, and gently assisting a beautiful lady to do the same, walked up to her whom he had known only by a name now almost forgotten—and with a beaming smile said, "Fair Lily of Liddisdale—this is my wife the Lady of the Priory—come—it is hard to say which of you should bear off the bell." Amy rose from her seat with an air graceful as ever, but something more matronly than that of Elliot's younger bride—and while these two fair creatures beheld each other with mutual admiration, their husbands stood there equally happy, and equally proud—George Elliot of the Priory, and Walter Harden of the Glenfoot.

MOSS-SIDE.

Gilbert Ainslie was a poor man; and he had been a poor man all the days of his life, which were not few, for his thin hair was now waxing grey. He had been born and bred on the small moorland farm which he now occupied; and he hoped to die there, as his father and grandfather had done before him, leaving a family just above the more bitter wants of this world. Labour, hard and unremitting, had been his lot in life; but, although sometimes severely tried, he had never repined; and through all the mist and gloom, and even the storms that had assailed him, he had lived on from year to year in that calm and resigned contentment which unconsciously cheers the hearthstone of the blameless poor. With his own hands he had

ploughed, sowed, and reaped his often scanty harvest, assisted, as they grew up, by three sons, who even in boyhood were happy to work along with their father in the fields. Out of doors or in, Gilbert Ainslie was never idle. The spade, the shears, the plough-shaft, the sickle, and the flail, all came readily to hands that grasped them well; and not a morsel of food was eaten under his roof, or a garment worn there, that was not honestly, severely, nobly earned. Gilbert Ainslie was a slave, but it was for them he loved with a sober and deep affection. The thraldom under which he lived God had imposed, and it only served to give his character a shade of silent gravity, but not austere; to make his smiles fewer, but more heartfelt; to calm his soul at grace before and after meals; and to kindle it in morning and evening prayer.

There is no need to tell the character of the wife of such a man. Meek and thoughtful, yet gladsome and gay withal, her heaven was in her house; and her gentler and weaker hands helped to bar the door against want. Of ten children that had been born to them, they had lost three; and as they had fed, clothed, and educated them respectably, so did they give them who died a respectable funeral. The living did not grudge to give up, for a while, some of their daily comforts, for the sake of the dead; and bought, with the little sums which their industry had saved, decent mournings, worn on Sabbath, and then carefully laid by. Of the seven that survived, two sons and a daughter were farm-servants in the neighbourhood, while two daughters and two sons remained at home, growing, or grown up, a small, happy, hard-working household.

Many cottages are there in Scotland like Moss-side, and many such humble and virtuous cottagers as were now beneath its roof of straw. The eye of the passing traveller may mark them, or mark them not, but they stand peacefully in thousands over all the land; and most beautiful do they make it, through all its wide valleys and narrow glens,—its low holms, encircled by the rocky walls of some bonny burn,—its green mounts elated with their little crowning groves of plane-trees,—its yellow cornfields,—its bare pastoral hill-sides, and all its heathy moors, on whose black bosom lie shining or concealed glades of excessive verdure, inhabited by flowers, and visited only by the far-flying bees. Moss-side was not beautiful to a careless or hasty eye; but, when looked on and surveyed, it seemed a pleasant dwelling. Its roof, overgrown with grass and moss, was almost as green as the ground out of which its weather-stained walls appeared to grow. The moss behind it was separated from a little garden, by a narrow slip of arable land, the dark colour of which showed that it had been won from the wild by patient industry, and by patient industry retained. It required a bright sunny day to make Moss-side fair; but then it was fair indeed; and when the little brown moorland birds were singing their short songs among the rushes and the heather, or a lark, perhaps lured thither by some green barley field for its undisturbed nest, rose ringing all over the enlivened solitude, the little bleak farm smiled like the paradise of poverty, sad and affecting in its lone and extreme simplicity. The boys and girls had

made some plots of flowers among the vegetables that the little garden supplied for their homely meals; pinks and carnations, brought from walled gardens of rich men farther down in the cultivated strath, grew here with somewhat diminished lustre; a bright show of tulips had a strange beauty in the midst of that moorland; and the smell of roses mixed well with that of the clover, the beautiful fair clover that loves the soil and the air of Scotland, and gives the rich and balmy milk to the poor man's lips.

In this cottage, Gilbert's youngest child, a girl about nine years of age, had been lying for a week in a fever. It was now Saturday evening, and the ninth day of the disease. Was she to live or die? It seemed as if a very few hours were between the innocent creature and heaven. All the symptoms were those of approaching death. The parents knew well the change that comes over the human face, whether it be in infancy, youth, or prime, just before the departure of the spirit; and as they stood together by Margaret's bed, it seemed to them that the fatal shadow had fallen upon her features. The surgeon of the parish lived some miles distant, but they expected him now every moment, and many a wistful look was directed by tearful eyes along the moor. The daughter who was out at service came anxiously home on this night, the only one that could be allowed her; for the poor must work in their grief, and servants must do their duty to those whose bread they eat, even when nature is sick—sick at heart. Another of the daughters came in from the potato-field beyond the brae, with what was to be their frugal supper. The calm noiseless spirit of life was in and around the house, while death seemed dealing with one who, a few days ago, was like light upon the floor, and the sound of music, that always breathed up when most wanted; glad and joyous in common talk—sweet, silvery, and mournful, when it joined in hymn or psalm. One after the other, they all continued going up to the bedside, and then coming away sobbing or silent, to see their merry little sister, who used to keep dancing all day like a butterfly in a meadow-field, or, like a butterfly with shut wings on a flower, trifling for a while in the silence of her joy, now tossing restlessly on her bed, and scarcely sensible to the words of endearment whispered around her, or the kisses dropped with tears, in spite of themselves, on her burning forehead.

Utter poverty often kills the affections; but a deep, constant, and common feeling of this world's hardships, and an equal participation in all those struggles by which they may be softened, unite husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, in thoughtful and subdued tenderness, making them happy indeed, while the circle round the fire is unbroken, and yet preparing them every day to bear the separation, when some one or other is taken slowly or suddenly away. Their souls are not moved by fits and starts, although, indeed, nature sometimes will wrestle with necessity; and there is a wise moderation both in the joy and the grief of the intelligent poor, which keeps lasting trouble away from their earthly lot, and prepares them silently and unconsciously for Heaven.

"Do you think the child is dying?" said Gilbert, with a calm

voice, to the surgeon, who, on his wearied horse, had just arrived from another sick-bed, over the misty range of hills, and had been looking steadfastly for some minutes on the little patient. The humane man knew the family well, in the midst of whom he was standing, and replied, "While there is life there is hope; but my pretty little Margaret is, I fear, in the last extremity." There was no loud lamentation at these words—all had before known, though they would not confess it to themselves, what they now were told—and though the certainty that was in the words of the skilful man made their hearts beat for a little with sicker throbbings, made their pale faces paler, and brought out from some eyes a greater gush of tears, yet death had been before in this house, and in this case he came, as he always does, in awe, but not in terror. There were wandering and wavering and dreamy delirious fantasies in the brain of the innocent child; but the few words she indistinctly uttered were affecting, not rending to the heart, for it was plain that she thought herself herding her sheep in the green silent pastures, and sitting wrapped in her plaid upon the lown and sunny side of the Birk-knowe. She was too much exhausted—there was too little life—too little breath in her heart, to frame a tune; but some of her words seemed to be from favourite old songs; and at last her mother wept, and turned aside her face, when the child, whose blue eyes were shut, and her lips almost still, breathed out these lines of the beautiful twenty-third Psalm:—

> "The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want.
> He makes me down to lie
> In pastures green: he leadeth me
> The quiet waters by."

The child was now left with none but her mother by the bedside, for it was said to be best so; and Gilbert and his family sat down round the kitchen fire, for a while, in silence. In about a quarter of an hour, they began to rise calmly, and to go each to his allotted work. One of the daughters went forth with the pail to milk the cow, and another began to set out the table in the middle of the floor for supper, covering it with a white cloth. Gilbert viewed the usual household arrangements with a solemn and untroubled eye; and there was almost the faint light of a grateful smile on his cheek, as he said to the worthy surgeon, "You will partake of our fare, after your day's travel and toil of humanity?" In a short silent half-hour, the potatoes and oat-cakes, butter and milk, were on the board; and Gilbert, lifting up his toil-hardened but manly hand, with a slow motion, at which the room was as hushed as if it had been empty, closed his eyes in reverence, and asked a blessing. There was a little stool, on which no one sat, by the old man's side. It had been put there unwittingly, when the other seats were all placed in their usual order; but the golden head that was wont to rise at that part of the table was now wanting. There was silence—not a word was said—their meal was before them—God had been thanked, and they began to eat.

While they were at their silent meal a horseman came galloping to the door, and, with a loud voice, called out that he had been sent express with a letter to Gilbert Ainslie; at the same time rudely, and with an oath, demanding a dram for his trouble. The eldest son, a lad of eighteen, fiercely seized the bridle of his horse, and turned its head away from the door. The rider, somewhat alarmed at the flushed face of the powerful stripling, threw down the letter and rode off. Gilbert took the letter from his son's hand, casting, at the same time, a half-upbraiding look on his face, that was returning to its former colour. "I feared,"—said the youth, with a tear in his eye,—"I feared that the brute's voice, and the trampling of the horse's feet, would have disturbed her." Gilbert held the letter hesitatingly in his hand, as if afraid at that moment to read it; at length he said aloud to the surgeon: "You know that I am a poor man, and debt, if justly incurred, and punctually paid when due, is no dishonour." Both his hand and his voice shook slightly as he spoke; but he opened the letter from the lawyer, and read it in silence. At this moment his wife came from her child's bedside, and, looking anxiously at her husband, told him "not to mind about the money, that no man who knew him would arrest his goods, or put him into prison. Though, dear me, it is cruel to be put to thus, when our bairn is dying, and when, if so it be the Lord's will, she should have a decent burial, poor innocent, like them that went before her." Gilbert continued reading the letter with a face on which no emotion could be discovered; and then, folding it up, he gave it to his wife, told her she might read it if she chose, and then put it into his desk in the room, beside the poor dear bairn. She took it from him, without reading it, and crushed it into her bosom: for she turned her ear towards her child, and thinking she heard it stir, ran out hastily to its bedside.

Another hour of trial passed, and the child was still swimming for its life. The very dogs knew there was grief in the house, and lay without stirring, as if hiding themselves, below the long table at the window. One sister sat with an unfinished gown on her knees, that she had been sewing for the dear child, and still continued at the hopeless work, she scarcely knew why: and often, often, putting up her hand to wipe away a tear. "What is that?" said the old man to his eldest daughter: "What is that you are laying on the shelf?" She could scarcely reply that it was a ribbon and an ivory comb that she had brought for little Margaret, against the night of the dancing-school ball. And at these words the father could not restrain a long, deep, and bitter groan; at which the boy, nearest in age to his dying sister, looked up weeping in his face; and, letting the tattered book of old ballads, which he had been poring on, but not reading, fall out of his hands, he rose from his seat, and, going into his father's bosom, kissed him, and asked God to bless him; for the holy heart of the boy was moved within him; and the old man, as he embraced him, felt that, in his innocence and simplicity, he was indeed a comforter. "The Lord giveth, and the

Lord taketh away," said the old man; "blessed be the name of the Lord!"

The outer door gently opened, and he whose presence had in former years brought peace and resignation hither, when their hearts had been tried even as they now were tried, stood before them. On the night before the Sabbath, the minister of Auchindown never left his Manse, except, as now, to visit the sick or dying bed. Scarcely could Gilbert reply to his first question about his child, when the surgeon came from the bedroom, and said, "Margaret seems lifted up by God's hand above death and the grave: I think she will recover. She has fallen asleep: and, when she wakes, I hope—I—believe—that the danger will be past, and that your child will live."

They were all prepared for death; but now they were found unprepared for life. One wept that had till then locked up all her tears within her heart; another gave a short palpitating shriek; and the tender-hearted Isobel, who had nursed the child when it was a baby, fainted away. The youngest brother gave way to gladsome smiles; and calling out his dog Hector, who used to sport with him and his little sister on the moor, he told the tidings to the dumb irrational creature, whose eyes, it is certain, sparkled with a sort of joy. The clock for some days had been prevented from striking the hours; but the silent fingers pointed to the hour of nine; and that, in the cottage of Gilbert Ainslie, was the stated hour of family worship. His own honoured minister took the book;

> "He waled a portion with judicious care;
> And, Let us worship God, he said, with solemn air."

A chapter was read—a prayer said; and so, too, was sung a psalm; but it was sung low, and with suppressed voices, lest the child's saving sleep might be broken; and now and then the female voices trembled, or some one of them ceased altogether; for there had been tribulation and anguish, and now hope and faith were tried in the joy of thanksgiving.

The child still slept; and its sleep seemed more sound and deep. It appeared almost certain that the crisis was over, and that the flower was not to fade. "Children," said Gilbert, "our happiness is in the love we bear to one another; and our duty is in submitting to and serving God. Gracious, indeed, has He been unto us. Is not the recovery of our little darling, dancing, singing Margaret, worth all the gold that ever was mined? If we had had thousands of thousands, would we not have filled up her grave with the worthless dross of gold, rather than that she should have gone down there with her sweet face and all her rosy smiles?" There was no reply; but a joyful sobbing all over the room.

"Never mind the letter, nor the debt, father," said the eldest daughter. "We have all some little thing of our own—a few pounds—and we shall be able to raise as much as will keep arrest and prison at a distance. Or if they do take our furniture out of the house, all except Margaret's bed, who cares? We will sleep on

the floor; and there are potatoes in the field, and clear water in the spring. We need fear nothing, want nothing; blessed be God for all his mercies!"

Gilbert went into the sick-room, and got the letter from his wife, who was sitting at the head of the bed, watching, with a heart blessed beyond all bliss, the calm and regular breathings of her child. "This letter," said he, mildly, "is not from a hard creditor. Come with me while I read it aloud to our children." The letter was read aloud, and it was well fitted to diffuse pleasure and satisfaction through the dwelling of poverty. It was from an executor to the will of a distant relative, who had left Gilbert Ainslie L.1500.

"The sum," said Gilbert, "is a large one to folks like us, but not, I hope, large enough to turn our heads, or make us think ourselves all lords and ladies. It will do more, far more, than put me fairly above the world at last. I believe, that, with it, I may buy this very farm, on which my forefathers have toiled. But God, whose providence has sent this temporal blessing, may He send us wisdom and prudence how to use it, and humble and grateful hearts to us all."

"You will be able to send me to school all the year round now, father," said the youngest boy. "And you may leave the flail to your sons now, father," said the eldest. "You may hold the plough still, for you draw a straighter furrow than any of us; but hard work for young sinews; and you may sit now oftener in your arm-chair by the ingle. You will not need to rise now in the dark, cold, and snowy winter mornings, and keep thrashing corn in the barn for hours by candle-light, before the late dawning."

There was silence, gladness, and sorrow, and but little sleep in Moss-side, between the rising and the setting of the stars, that were now out in thousands, clear, bright, and sparkling over the unclouded sky. Those who had lain down for an hour or two in bed could scarcely be said to have slept; and when about morning little Margaret awoke, an altered creature, pale, languid, and unable to turn herself on her lowly bed, but with meaning in her eyes, memory in her mind, affection in her heart, and coolness in all her veins, a happy group were watching the first faint smile that broke over her features; and never did one who stood there forget that Sabbath morning, on which she seemed to look round upon them all with a gaze of fair and sweet bewilderment, like one half conscious of having been rescued from the power of the grave.

AN HOUR IN THE MANSE.

In a few weeks the annual Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was to be administered in the parish of Deanside; and the minister, venerable in old age, of authority by the power of his talents and learning, almost feared for his sanctity, yet withal beloved for gentleness and

compassion that had never been found wanting, when required either by the misfortunes or errors of any of his flock, had delivered for several successive Sabbaths, to full congregations, sermons on the proper preparation of communicants in that awful ordinance. The old man was a follower of Calvin; and many, who had listened to him with a resolution in their hearts to approach the table of the Redeemer, felt so awe-stricken and awakened at the conclusion of his exhortations, that they gave their souls another year to meditate on what they had heard, and by a pure and humble course of life, to render themselves less unworthy to partake the mysterious and holy bread and wine.

The good old man received in the Manse, for a couple of hours every evening, such of his parishioners as came to signify their wish to partake of the Sacrament; and it was then noted, that, though he in nowise departed, in his conversation with them at such times, from the spirit of those doctrines which he had delivered from the pulpit, yet his manner was milder, and more soothing, and full of encouragement; so that many who went to him almost with quaking hearts, departed in tranquillity and peace, and looked forward to that most impressive and solemn act of the Christian faith with calm and glad anticipation. The old man thought truly and justly, that few, if any, would come to the Manse, after having heard him in the kirk, without due and deep reflection; and, therefore, though he allowed none to pass through his hands without strict examination, he spoke to them all benignly, and with that sort of paternal pity which a religious man, about to leave this life, feels towards all his brethren of mankind, who are entering upon, or engaged in, its scenes of agitation, trouble, and danger.

On one of those evenings, the servant showed into the minister's study a tall, bold-looking, dark-visaged man, in the prime of life, who, with little of the usual courtesy, advanced into the middle of the room, and somewhat abruptly declared the sacred purpose of his visit. But before he could receive a reply, he looked around and before him; and there was something so solemn in the old minister's appearance, as he sat like a spirit, with his unclouded eyes fixed upon the intruder, that that person's countenance fell, and his heart was involuntarily knocking against his side. An old large Bible, the same that he read from in the pulpit, was lying open before him. One glimmering candle showed his beautiful and silvery locks falling over his temples, as his head half stooped over the sacred page; a dead silence was in the room dedicated to meditation and prayer; the old man, it was known, had for some time felt himself to be dying, and had spoken of the Sacrament of this summer as the last he could ever hope to administer; so that altogether, in the silence, the dimness, the sanctity, the unworldliness of the time, the place, and the being before him, the visitor stood like one abashed and appalled; and bowing more reverently, or at least respectfully, he said, with a hurried and quivering voice, "Sir, I come for your sanction to be admitted to the table of our Lord."

The minister motioned to him with his hand to sit down, and it

was a relief to the trembling man to do so, for he was in the presence of one who, he felt, saw into his heart. A sudden change, from hardihood to terror, took place within his dark nature; he wished himself out of the insupportable sanctity of that breathless room; and a remorse, that had hitherto slept, or been drowned within him, now clutched his heartstrings, as if with an alternate grasp of frost and fire, and made his knees knock against each other where he sat, and his face pale as ashes.

"Norman Adams, saidst thou that thou wilt take into that hand, and put into those lips, the symbol of the blood that was shed for sinners, and of the body that bowed on the cross, and then gave up the ghost? If so, let us speak together, even as if thou wert communing with thine own heart. Never again may I join in that Sacrament, for the hour of my departure is at hand. Say, wilt thou eat and drink death to thine immortal soul?"

The terrified man found strength to rise from his seat, and staggering towards the door, said, "Pardon, forgive me!—I am not worthy."

"It is not I who can pardon, Norman. That power lies not with man; but sit down—you are deadly pale—and though, I fear, an ill-living and a dissolute man, greater sinners have repented, and been saved. Approach not now the table of the Lord, but confess all your sins before him in the silence of your own house, and upon your naked knees on the stone-floor every morning and every night; and if this you do faithfully, humbly, and with a contrite heart, come to me again when the Sacrament is over, and I will speak words of comfort to you (if then I am able to speak), if, Norman, it should be on my deathbed. This will I do for the sake of thy soul, and for the sake of thy father, Norman, whom my soul loved, and who was a support to me in my ministry for many long long years, even for twoscore and ten, for we were at school together; and had your father been living now, he would, like myself, have this very day finished his eighty-fifth year. I send you not from me in anger, but in pity and love. Go, my son, and this very night begin your repentance, for if that face speak the truth, your heart must be sorely charged."

Just as the old man ceased speaking, and before the humble, or at least affrighted culprit had risen to go, another visitor of a very different kind was shown into the room,—a young beautiful girl, almost shrouded in her cloak, with a sweet pale face, on which sadness seemed in vain to strive with the natural expression of the happiness of youth.

"Mary Simpson," said the kind old man, as she stood with a timid courtesy near the door—"Mary Simpson, approach, and receive from my hands the token for which thou comest. Well dost thou know the history of thy Saviour's life, and rejoicest in the life and immortality brought to light by the Gospel. Young and guileless, Mary, art thou, and dim as my memory now is of many things, yet do I well remember the evening, when first beside my knee, thou

heardst read how the divine Infant was laid in a manger—how the wise men from the East came to the place of His nativity—and how the angels were heard singing in the fields of Bethlehem all the night long."

Alas! every word that had thus been uttered sent a pang into the poor creature's heart, and, without lifting her eyes from the floor, and in a voice more faint and hollow than belonged to one so young, she said, "O sir! I come not as an intending communicant; yet the Lord my God knows that I am rather miserable than guilty, and he will not suffer my soul to perish, though a baby is now within me, the child of guilt, and sin, and horror. This, my shame, come I to tell you; but for the father of my babe unborn, cruel though he has been to me—oh! cruel, cruel, indeed—yet shall his name go down with me in silence to the grave. I must not, must not breathe his name in mortal ears; but I have looked round me in the wide moor, and when nothing that could understand was by, nothing living but birds, and bees, and the sheep I was herding, often have I whispered his name in my prayers, and beseeched God and Jesus to forgive him all his sins."

At these words, of which the passionate utterance seemed to relieve her heart, and before the pitying and bewildered old man could reply, Mary Simpson raised her eyes from the floor, and, fearing to meet the face of the minister, which had heretofore never shone upon her but with smiles, and of which the expected frown was to her altogether insupportable, she turned them wildly round the room, as if for a dark resting-place, and beheld Norman Adams rooted to his seat, leaning towards her with his white ghastly countenance, and his eyes starting from their sockets, seemingly in wrath, agony, fear, and remorse. That terrible face struck poor Mary to the heart, and she sank against the wall, and slipped down, shuddering, upon a chair.

"Norman Adams, I am old and weak, but do you put your arm round that poor lost creature, and keep her from falling down on the hard floor. I hear it is a stormy night, and she has walked some miles hither; no wonder she is overcome. You have heard her confession, but it was not meant for your ear; so, till I see you again, say nothing of what you have now heard."

"O sir! a cup of water, for my blood is either leaving my heart altogether, or it is drowning it. Your voice, sir, is going far, far away from me, and I am sinking down. Oh! hold me—hold me up! Is it a pit into which I am falling?—Saw I not Norman Adams?—Where is he now?"

The poor maiden did not fall off the chair, although Norman Adams supported her not; but her head lay back against the wall, and a sigh, long and dismal, burst from her bosom, that deeply affected the old man's heart, but struck that of the speechless and motionless sinner like the first toll of the prison bell that warns the felon to leave his cell and come forth to execution.

The minister fixed a stern eye upon Norman, for, from the poor

girl's unconscious words, it was plain that he was the guilty wretch who had wrought all this misery. "You knew, did you not, that she had neither father nor mother, sister nor brother, scarcely one relation on earth to care for or watch over her; and yet you have used her so? If her beauty was a temptation unto you, did not the sweet child's innocence touch your hard and selfish heart with pity? or her guilt and grief must surely now wring it with remorse. Look on her—white—cold—breathless—still as a corpse; and yet, thou bold bad man, thy footsteps would have approached the Table of thy Lord!"

The child now partly awoke from her swoon, and her dim opening eyes met those of Norman Adams. She shut them with a shudder, and said, sickly and with a quivering voice, "Oh spare, spare me, Norman! Are we again in that dark fearful wood? Tremble not for your life on earth, Norman, for never, never will I tell to mortal ears that terrible secret; but spare me, spare me, else our Saviour, with all His mercy, will never pardon your unrelenting soul. These are cruel-looking eyes; you will not surely murder poor Mary Simpson, unhappy as she is, and must for ever be—yet life is sweet! She beseeches you on her knees to spare her life!"—and, in the intense fear of fantasy, the poor creature struggled off the chair, and fell down indeed in a heap at his feet.

"Canst thou indeed be the son of old Norman Adams, the industrious, the temperate, the mild and the pious—who so often sat in this very room, which thy presence has now polluted, and spake with me on the mysteries of life and of death? Foul ravisher, what stayed thy hand from the murder of that child, when there were none near to hear her shrieks in the dark solitude of the great pine-wood?"

Norman Adams smote his heart, and fell down too on his knees beside the poor ruined orphan. He put his arm round her, and, raising her from the floor, said, "No, no, my sin is great, too great for Heaven's forgiveness; but, O sir! say not—say not that I would have murdered her: for, savage as my crime was, yet may God judge me less terribly than if I had taken her life."

In a little while they were both seated with some composure, and silence was in the room. No one spoke, and the old grey-haired man sat with eyes fixed, without reading, on the open Bible. At last he broke silence with these words out of Isaiah, that seemed to have forced themselves on his heedless eyes:—"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Mary Simpson wept aloud at these words, and seemed to forget her own wrongs and grief in commiseration of the agonies of remorse and fear that were now plainly preying on the soul of the guilty man. "I forgive you, Norman, and will soon be out of the way, no longer to anger you with the sight of me." Then, fixing her streaming eyes on the minister, she besought him not to be the means of bringing him to punishment and a shameful death, for that he might repent, and live to be a good man and respected in the parish; but

that she was a poor orphan for whom few cared, and who, when dead, would have but a small funeral.

"I will deliver myself up into the hands of justice," said the offender, "for I do not deserve to live. Mine was an inhuman crime, and let a violent and shameful death be my doom."

The orphan girl now stood up as if her strength had been restored, and, stretching out her hands passionately, with a flow of most affecting and beautiful language, inspired by a meek, single, and sinless heart, that could not bear the thought of utter degradation and wretchedness befalling any one of the rational children of God, implored and beseeched the old man to comfort the sinner before them, and promise that the dark transaction of guilt should never leave the concealment of their own three hearts. "Did he not save the lives of two brothers once who were drowning in that black mossy loch, when their own kindred, at work among the hay, feared the deep sullen water, and all stood aloof shuddering and shaking, till Norman Adams leapt in to their rescue, and drew them by the dripping hair to the shore, and then lay down beside them on the heather, as like to death as themselves? I myself saw it done: I myself heard their mother call down the blessing of God on Norman's head, and then all the haymakers knelt down and prayed. When you, on the Sabbath, returned thanks to God for that they were saved, oh! kind sir, did you not name, in the full kirk, him who, under Providence, did deliver them from death, and who, you said, had thus showed himself to be a Christian indeed? May his sin against me be forgotten, for the sake of those two drowning boys, and their mother, who blesses his name unto this day."

From a few questions solemnly asked, and solemnly answered, the minister found that Norman Adams had been won by the beauty and loveliness of this poor orphan shepherdess, as he had sometimes spoken to her when sitting on the hill-side with her flock, but that pride had prevented him from ever thinking of her in marriage. It appeared that he had also been falsely informed, by a youth whom Mary disliked for his brutal and gross manners, that she was not the innocent girl that her seeming simplicity denoted. On returning from a festive meeting, where this abject person had made many mean insinuations against her virtue, Norman Adams met her returning to her master's house, in the dusk of the evening, on the footpath leading through a lonely wood; and, though his crime was of the deepest dye, it seemed to the minister of the religion of mercy that, by repentance and belief in the atonement that had once been made for sinners, he too might perhaps hope for forgiveness at the throne of God.

"I warned you, miserable man, of the fatal nature of sin, when first it brought a trouble over your countenance, and broke in upon the peaceful integrity of your life. Was not the silence of the night often terrible to you, when you were alone in the moors, and the whisper of your own conscience told you, that every wicked thought was sacrilege to your father's dust? Step by step, and almost imperceptibly, perhaps, did you advance upon the road that

leadeth to destruction; but look back now, and what a long dark journey have you taken, standing as you are, on the brink of everlasting death. Once you were kind, gentle, generous, manly, and free: but you trusted to the deceitfulness of your own heart; you estranged yourself from the house of the God of your fathers, and what has your nature done for you at last, but sunk you into a wretch, savage, selfish, cruel, cowardly, and in good truth a slave? A felon are you, and forfeited to the hangman's hands. Look on that poor innocent child, and think what is man without God. What would you give now if the last three years of your reckless life had been passed in a dungeon dug deep into the earth, with hunger and thirst gnawing at your heart, and bent down under a cartload of chains? Yet look not so ghastly, for I condemn you not utterly; nor, though I know your guilt, can I know what good may yet be left uncorrupted and unextinguished in your soul. Kneel not to me, Norman; fasten not so your eyes upon me; lift them upwards, and then turn them in upon your own heart, for the dreadful reckoning is between it and God."

Mary Simpson had now recovered all her strength, and she knelt down by the side of the groaner. Deep was the pity she now felt for him, who to her had shown no pity; she did not refuse to lay her right arm tenderly upon his neck. Often had she prayed to God to save his soul, even among her rueful sobs of shame in the solitary glens; and now that she beheld his sin punished with a remorse more than he could bear, the orphan would have willingly died to avert from his prostrate head the wrath of the Almighty.

The old man wept at the sight of so much innocence, and so much guilt, kneeling together before God, in strange union and fellowship of a common being. With his own fatherly arms he lifted up the orphan from her knees, and said: "Mary Simpson, my sweet and innocent Mary Simpson, for innocent thou art, the elders will give thee a token, that will, on Sabbath-day, admit thee (not for the first time, though so young) to the communion-table. Fear not to approach it; look at me, and on my face, when I bless the elements, and be thou strong in the strength of the Lord. Norman Adams, return to your home. Go into the chamber where your father died. Let your knees wear out the part of the floor on which he kneeled. It is somewhat worn already; you have seen the mark of your father's knees. Who knows, but that pardon and peace may descend from Heaven even upon such a sinner as thou? On none such as thou have mine eyes ever looked, in knowledge, among all those who have lived and died under my care, for three generations. But great is the unknown guilt that may be hidden even in the churchyard of a small quiet parish like this! Dost thou feel as if God-forsaken? Or, oh! say it unto me, canst thou, my poor son, dare to hope for repentance?"

The pitiful tone of the old man's trembling voice, and the motion of his shaking and withered hands, as he lifted them up almost in an attitude of benediction, completed the prostration of that sinner's spirit. All his better nature, which had too long been oppressed

under scorn of holy ordinances, and the coldness of infidelity, and the selfishness of lawless desires that insensibly harden the heart they do not dissolve, now struggled to rise up and respect its rights. "When I remember what I once was, I can hope—when I think what I now am, I only, only fear."

A storm of rain and wind had come on, and Mary Simpson slept in the manse that night. On the ensuing Sabbath she partook of the Sacrament. A woeful illness fell upon Norman Adams; and then for a long time no one saw him, or knew where he had gone. It was said that he was in a distant city, and that he was a miserable creature, that never again could look upon the sun. But it was otherwise ordered. He returned to his farm, greatly changed in face and person, but even yet more changed in spirit.

The old minister had more days allotted to him than he had thought, and was not taken away for some summers. Before he died, he had reason to know that Norman Adams had repented in tears of blood, in thoughts of faith, and in deeds of charity; and he did not fear to admit him, too, in good time, to the holy ordinance, along with Mary Simpson, then his wife, and the mother of his children.

THE HEADSTONE.

The coffin was let down to the bottom of the grave, the planks were removed from the heaped-up brink, the first rattling clods had struck their knell, the quick shovelling was over, and the long, broad, skilfully cut pieces of turf were aptly joined together, and trimly laid by the beating spade, so that the newest mound in the churchyard was scarcely distinguishable from those that were grown over by the undisturbed grass and daisies of a luxuriant spring. The burial was soon over; and the party, with one consenting motion, having uncovered their heads in decent reverence of the place and occasion, were beginning to separate, and about to leave the churchyard. Here, some acquaintances, from distant parts of the parish, who had not had an opportunity of addressing each other in the house that had belonged to the deceased, nor in the course of a few hundred yards that the little procession had to move over from his bed to his grave, were shaking hands, quietly but cheerfully, and inquiring after the welfare of each other's families. There, a small knot of neighbours were speaking, without exaggeration, of the respectable character which the deceased had borne, and mentioning to one another little incidents of his life, some of them so remote as to be known only to the grey-headed persons of the group; while a few yards further removed from the spot, were standing together parties who discussed ordinary concerns, altogether unconnected with the funeral, such as the state of the markets, the promise of the season, or change of tenants; but

still with a sobriety of manner and voice, that was insensibly produced by the influence of the simple ceremony now closed, by the quiet graves around, and the shadow of the spire and grey walls of the house of God.

Two men yet stood together at the head of the grave, with countenances of sincere but unimpassioned grief. They were Brothers, the only sons of him who had been buried. And there was something in their situation that naturally kept the eyes of many directed upon them, for a longer time, and more intently, than would have been the case had there been nothing more observable about them than the common symptoms of a common sorrow. But these two Brothers, who were now standing at the head of their father's grave, had for some years been totally estranged from each other, and the only words that had passed between them, during all that time, had been uttered within a few days past, during the necessary preparations for the old man's funeral.

No deep and deadly quarrel was between these Brothers, and neither of them could distinctly tell the cause of this unnatural estrangement. Perhaps dim jealousies of their father's favour—selfish thoughts that will sometimes force themselves into poor men's hearts, respecting temporal expectations—unaccommodating manners on both sides—taunting words that mean little when uttered, but which rankle and fester in remembrance—imagined opposition of interests, that, duly considered, would have been found one and the same—these, and many other causes, slight when single, but strong when rising up together in one baneful band, had gradually but fatally infected their hearts, till at last they who in youth had been seldom separate, and truly attached, now met at market, and, miserable to say, at church, with dark and averted faces, like different clansmen during a feud.

Surely if anything could have softened their hearts towards each other, it must have been to stand silently, side by side, while the earth, stones, and clods, were falling down upon their father's coffin. And, doubtless, their hearts were so softened. But pride, though it cannot prevent the holy affections of nature from being felt, may prevent them from being shown; and these two Brothers stood there together, determined not to let each other know the mutual tenderness that, in spite of them, was gushing up in their hearts, and teaching them the unconfessed folly and wickedness of their causeless quarrel.

A Headstone had been prepared, and a person came forward to plant it. The elder Brother directed him how to place it—a plain stone, with a sand-glass, skull, and cross-bones, chiselled not rudely, and a few words inscribed. The younger Brother regarded the operation with a troubled eye, and said loudly enough to be heard by several of the bystanders, "William, this was not kind in you; —you should have told me of this. I loved my father as well as you could love him. You were the elder, and, it may be, the favourite son; but I had a right in nature to have joined you in ordering this headstone, had I not?"

During these words, the stone was sinking into the earth, and many persons who were on their way from the grave returned. For a while the elder Brother said nothing, for he had a consciousness in his heart that he ought to have consulted his father's son in designing this last becoming mark of affection and respect to his memory; so the stone was planted in silence, and now stood erect, decently and simply among the other unostentatious memorials of the humble dead.

The inscription merely gave the name and age of the deceased, and told that the stone had been erected "by his affectionate sons." The sight of these words seemed to soften the displeasure of the angry man, and he said, somewhat more mildly, "Yes, we were his affectionate sons, and since my name is on the stone, I am satisfied, Brother. We have not drawn together kindly of late years, and perhaps never may; but I acknowledge and respect your worth; and here, before our own friends, and before the friends of our father, with my foot above his head, I express my willingness to be on better and other terms with you, and if we cannot command love in our hearts, let us, at least, Brother, bar out all unkindness."

The minister, who had attended the funeral, and had something intrusted to him to say publicly before he left the churchyard, now came forward, and asked the elder Brother why he spake not regarding this matter. He saw that there was something of a cold and sullen pride rising up in his heart—for not easily may any man hope to dismiss from the chamber of his heart even the vilest guest, if once cherished there. With a solemn and almost severe air, he looked upon the relenting man, and then, changing his countenance into serenity, said gently,

> "Behold how good a thing it is,
> And how becoming well,
> Together such as brethren are,
> In unity to dwell."

The time, the place, and this beautiful expression of a natural sentiment, quite overcame a heart in which many kind, if not warm, affections dwelt; and the man thus appealed to bowed down his head and wept.

"Give me your hand, Brother;" and it was given, while a murmur of satisfaction arose from all present, and all hearts felt kindlier and more humanely towards each other.

As the Brothers stood fervently, but composedly, grasping each other's hands, in the little hollow that lay between the grave of their mother, long since dead, and that of their father, whose shroud was haply not yet still from the fall of dust to dust, the minister stood beside them with a pleasant countenance, and said: "I must fulfil the promise I made to your father on his deathbed. I must read to you a few words which his hand wrote at an hour when his tongue denied its office. I must not say that you did your duty to your old father; for did he not often beseech you, apart from one another, to

be reconciled, for your own sakes as Christians, for his sake, and for the sake of the mother who bare you, and, Stephen, who died that you might be born? When the palsy struck him for the last time, you were both absent, nor was it your fault that you were not beside the old man when he died. As long as sense continued with him here, did he think of you two, and of you two alone. Tears were in his eyes; I saw them there, and on his cheek too, when no breath came from his lips. But of this no more. He died with this paper in his hand; and he made me know that I was to read it to you over his grave. I now obey him.

"'My sons, if you will let my bones lie quiet in the grave, near the dust of your mother, depart not from my burial till, in the name of God and Christ, you promise to love one another as you used to do. Dear boys, receive my blessing.'"

Some turned their heads away to hide the tears that needed not to be hidden,—and when the Brothers had released each other from a long and sobbing embrace, many went up to them, and in a single word or two, expressed their joy at this perfect reconcilement. The Brothers themselves walked away from the churchyard, arm-in-arm with the minister, to the manse. On the following Sabbath they were seen sitting with their families in the same pew, and it was observed that they read together off the same Bible when the minister gave out the text, and that they sang together, taking hold of the same Psalm-Book. The same Psalm was sung (given out at their own request), of which one verse had been repeated at their father's grave; a larger sum than usual was on that Sabbath found in the plate for the poor, for Love and Charity are sisters. And ever after, both during the peace and the troubles of this life, the hearts of the Brothers were as one, and in nothing were they divided.

SUNSET AND SUNRISE.

"This is the evening on which, a few days ago, we agreed to walk to the Bower at the Waterfall, and look at the perfection of a Scottish sunset. Everything on earth and heaven seems at this hour as beautiful as our souls could desire. Come then, my sweet Anna, come along, for by the time we have reached the Bower, with your gentle steps, the great bright orb will be nearly resting its rim on what you call the Ruby Mountain. Come along, and we can return before the dew has softened a single ringlet on your fair forehead." With these words, the happy husband locked kindly within his own the arm of his young English wife; and even in the solitude of his unfrequented groves, where no eye but his own now beheld her, looked with pride on the gracefulness and beauty that seemed so congenial with the singleness and simplicity of her soul.

They reached the Bower just as the western heaven was in all its glory. To them, while they stood together gazing on that glow of fire that burns without consuming, and in whose mighty furnace the clouds and the mountain-tops are but as embers, there seemed to exist no sky but that region of it in which their spirits were entranced. Their eyes saw it—their souls felt it; but what their eyes saw or their souls felt they knew not in the mystery of that magnificence. The vast black bars—the piled-up masses of burnished gold—the beds of softest saffron and richest purple, lying surrounded with continually fluctuating dyes of crimson, till the very sun himself was for moments unheeded in the gorgeousness his light had created—the show of storm but the feeling of calm over all that tumultuous, yet settled world of cloud, that had come floating silently and majestically together, and yet in one little hour was to be no more;—what might not beings endowed with a sense of beauty, and greatness, and love, and fear, and terror, and eternity, feel when drawing their breath together, and turning their steadfast eyes on each other's faces, in such a scene as this?

But from these high and bewildering imaginations, their souls returned insensibly to the real world in which their life lay; and, still feeling the presence of that splendid sunset, although now they looked not towards it, they let their eyes glide, in mere human happiness, over the surface of the inhabited earth. The green fields, that in all varieties of form lay stretching out before them, the hedgerows of hawthorn and sweetbrier, the humble coppices, the stately groves, and in the distance, the dark pine-forest loading the mountain-side, were all their own—and so, too, were a hundred cottages, on height or hollow, shelterless or buried in shelter, and all alike dear to their humble inmates, on account of their cheerfulness or their repose. God had given to them this bright and beautiful portion of the earth, and he had given them along with it hearts and souls to feel and understand in what lay the worth of the gift, and to enjoy it with a deep and thoughtful gratitude.

"All hearts bless you, Anna; and do you know that the Shepherd Poet, whom we once visited in his shieling, has composed a Gaelic song on our marriage, and it is now sung by many a pretty Highland girl, both in cottage and on hill-side. They wondered, it is said, why I should have brought them an English lady; but that was before they saw your face, or heard how sweet may be an English voice even to a Highland ear. They love you, Anna; they would die for you, Anna; for they have seen you with your sweet body in silk and satin, with a jewel on your forehead and pearls in your hair, moving to music in your husband's hereditary hall; and they have seen you, too, in russet garb and ringlets unadorned, in their own smoky cottages, blithe and free as some native shepherdess of the hills. To the joyful and the sorrowful art thou alike dear; and all my tenantry are rejoiced when you appear, whether on your palfrey on the heather, or walking through the hay or harvest field, or sitting by the bed of sickness, or welcoming, with a gentle stateliness, the old withered mountaineer to his chieftain's gate.

The tears fell from the lady's eyes at these kind, loving, and joyful words; and, with a sob, she leaned her cheek on her husband's bosom.

"Oh! why—why should I be sad in the midst of the undeserved goodness of God? Since the furthest back time I recollect in the darkness of infancy, I have been perfectly happy. I have never lost any dear friend, as so many others have done. My father and mother live, and love me well; blessings be upon them now, and for ever! You love me, and that so tenderly, that at times my heart is like to break. But, my husband—forgive me—pity me—but upbraid me not, when I tell you that my soul of late has often fainted within me, as now it does—for oh! husband! husband! the fear of death is upon me; and as the sun sank behind the mountain, I thought that moment of a large burial-place, and the vault in which I am to be interred."

These words gave a shock to her husband's heart, and for a few moments he knew not how to cheer and comfort her. Almost before he could speak, and while he was silently kissing her forehead, his young wife, somewhat more composedly, said, "I strive against it—I close my eyes to contain—to crush the tears that I feel gushing up from my stricken heart; but they force their way through, and my face is often ruefully drenched in solitude. Well may I weep to leave this world—thee—my parents—the rooms in which, for a year of perfect bliss, I have walked, sat, or slept in thy bosom—all these beautiful woods, and plains, and hills, which I have begun to feel every day more and more as belonging unto me, because I am thy wife. But, husband! beyond, far, far beyond them all, except him of whose blood it is, do I weep to leave our baby that is now unborn. May it live to comfort you—to gladden your eyes when I am gone—yea, to bring tears sometimes into them, when its face or form may chance to remember you of the mother who bore it, and died that it might see the day."

The lady rose up with these words from her husband's bosom; and as a sweet balmy whispering breath of wind came from the broom on the river's bank, and fanned her cheeks, she seemed to revive from that desponding dream; and, with a faint smile, looked all round the sylvan bower. The cheerful hum of the bees, that seemed to be hastening their work among the honey-flowers before the fall of dark—the noise of the river that had been unheard while the sun was setting—the lowing of the kine going leisurely homewards before their infant drivers—and the loud lofty song of the blackbird in his grove—these, and a thousand other mingling influences of nature, touched her heart with joy and her eyes became altogether free from tears. Her husband, who had been deeply affected by words so new to him from her lips, seized these moments of returning peace to divert her thoughts entirely from such causeless terrors. "To this bower I brought you to show you what a Scottish landscape was, the day after our marriage; and from that hour to this, every look, smile, word, and deed of thine, has been after my own heart, except these foolish tears. But the dew will soon be on the grass—so come, my beloved—nay, I will not stir unless you smile. There, Anna! you are your beautiful self again!" And they returned cheerful and laugh-

ing to the Hall; the lady's face being again as bright as if a tear had never dimmed its beauty. The glory of the sunset was almost forgotten in the sweet, fair, pensive silence of the twilight, now fast glimmering on to one of those clear summer nights which divide, for a few hours, one day from another with their transitory pomp of stars.

Before midnight, all who slept awoke. It was hoped that an heir was about to be born to that ancient house; and there is something in the dim and solemn reverence which invests an unbroken line of ancestry, that blends easily with those deeper and more awful feelings with which the birth of a human creature, in all circumstances, is naturally regarded. Tenderly beloved by all as this young and beautiful lady was, who, coming a stranger among them, and as they felt from another land, had inspired them insensibly with a sort of pity mingling with their pride in her loveliness and virtue, it may well be thought that now the house was agitated, and that its agitation was soon spread from cottage to cottage, to a great distance round. Many a prayer, therefore, was said for her; and God was beseeched soon to make her, in his mercy, a joyful mother. No fears, it was said, were entertained for the lady's life; but after some hours of intolerable anguish of suspense, her husband, telling an old servant whither he had gone, walked out into the open air, and, in a few minutes, sat down on a tombstone, without knowing that he had entered the little churchyard, which, with the parish church, was within a few fields and groves of the house. He looked around him; and nothing but graves—graves—graves. "This stone was erected by her husband in memory of Agnes Ilford, an Englishwoman, who died in childbed, aged nineteen." The inscription was, every letter of it, distinctly legible in the moonlight; and he held his eyes fixed upon it, reading it over and over with a shudder; and then rising up and hurrying out of the churchyard, he looked back from the gate, and thought he saw a female figure all in white, with an infant in her arms, gliding noiselessly over the graves and tombstones. But he looked more steadfastly—and it was nothing. He knew it was nothing; but he was terrified, and turned his face away from the churchyard. The old servant advanced towards him, and he feared to look him in the face, lest he should know that his wife was a corpse.

"Life or death?" at length he found power to utter. "My honoured lady lives, but her son breathed only a few gasps—no heir, no heir! I was sent to tell you to come quickly to my lady's chamber."

In a moment the old man was alone, for, recovering from the torpidity of fear, his master had flown off like an arrow, and now with soft footsteps was stealing along the corridor towards the door of his wife's apartment. But as he stood within a few steps of it, composing his countenance, and strengthening his heart to behold his beloved Anna lying exhausted, and too probably ill, ill indeed,—his own mother, like a shadow, came out of the room, and not knowing that she was seen, clasped her hands together upon her breast, and lifting up her eyes with an expression of despair, exclaimed, as in a

petition to God, "Oh! my poor son!—my poor son! what will become of him!" She looked forward, and there was her son before her, with a face like ashes, tottering and speechless. She embraced and supported him—the old and feeble supported the young and the strong. "I am blind, and must feel my way; but help me to the bedside that I may sit down and kiss my dead wife. I ought to have been there, surely, when she died."

The lady was dying, but not dead. It was thought that she was insensible, but when her husband said, "Anna—Anna!" she fixed her hitherto unnoticing eyes upon his face, and moved her lips as if speaking, but no words were heard. He stooped down and kissed her forehead, and then there was a smile over all her face, and one word, "Farewell!" At that faint and loving voice he touched her lips with his, and he must then have felt her parting breath; for when he again looked on her face, the smile upon it was more deep, placid, steadfast, than any living smile, and a mortal silence was on her bosom that was to move no more.

They sat together, he and his mother, looking on the young, fair, and beautiful dead. Sometimes he was distracted, and paced the room raving, and with a black and gloomy aspect. Then he sat down perfectly composed, and looked alternately on the countenance of his young wife, bright, blooming, and smiling in death; and on that of his old mother, pale, withered, and solemn in life. As yet he had no distinct thoughts of himself. Overwhelming pity for one so young, so good, so beautiful, and so happy, taken suddenly away, possessed his disconsolate soul; and he would have wept with joy to see her restored to life, even although he were to live with her no more, though she were utterly to forget him; for what would that be to him, so that she were but alive! He felt that he could have borne to be separated from her by seas, or by a dungeon's walls; for in the strength of his love he would have been happy, knowing that she was a living being beneath Heaven's sunshine. But in a few days is she to be buried!—And then was he forced to think upon himself, and his utter desolation, changed in a few hours from a too perfect happiness, into a wretch whose existence was an anguish and a curse.

At last he could not sustain the sweet, sad, beautiful sight of that which was now lying stretched upon his marriage-bed; and he found himself passing along the silent passages, with faint and distant lamentations meeting his ear, but scarcely recognised by his mind, until he felt the fresh air, and saw the grey dawn of morning. Slowly and unconsciously he passed on into the woods, and walked on and on, without aim or object, through the solitude of awakening nature. He heard or heeded not the wide-ringing songs of all the happy birds; he saw not the wildflowers beneath his feet, nor the dew diamonds that glittered on every leaf of the motionless trees. The ruins of a lonely hut on the hill-side were close to him, and he sat down in stupefaction, as if he had been an exile in some foreign country. He lifted up his eyes, and the sun was rising, so that all the eastern heaven was tinged with the beautifulness of joy. The

turrets of his own ancestral mansion were visible among the dark umbrage of its ancient grove : fair were the lawns and fields that stretched away from it towards the orient light, and one bright bend of the river kindled up the dim scenery through which it rolled. His own family estate was before his eyes, and as the thought rose within his heart, "All that I see is mine," yet felt he that the poorest beggar was richer far than he, and that in one night he had lost all that was worth possessing. He saw the church tower, and thought upon the place of graves. "There will she be buried,—there will she be buried," he repeated with a low voice, while a groan of mortal misery startled the little moss-wren from a crevice in the ruin. He rose up, and the thought of suicide entered into his sick heart. He gazed on the river, and murmuring aloud in his hopeless wretchedness, said, "Why should I not sink into a pool and be drowned? But oh! Anna, thou who wert so meek and pure on earth, and who art now bright and glorious in heaven, what would thy sainted and angelic spirit feel if I were to appear thus lost and wicked at the judgment-seat?"

A low voice reached his ear, and, looking round, he beheld his old, faithful, white-headed servant on his knees—him who had been his father's foster-brother, and who, in the privilege of age and fidelity and love to all belonging to that House, had followed him unregarded—had watched him as he wrung his hands, and had been praying for him to God while he continued sitting in that dismal trance upon that mouldering mass of ruins. "Oh! my young master, pardon me for being here.—I wished not to overhear your words; but to me you have ever been kind, even as a son to his father.—Come, then, with the old man, back into the Hall, and forsake not your mother who is sore afraid."

They returned, without speaking, down the glens, and through the old woods, and the door was shut upon them. Days and nights passed on, and then a bell tolled; and the churchyard, that had sounded to many feet, was again silent. The woods around the Hall were loaded with their summer glories; the river flowed on in its brightness; the smoke rose up to Heaven from the quiet cottages; and nature continued the same—bright, fragrant, beautiful, and happy. But the Hall stood uninhabited; the rich furniture now felt the dust; and there were none to gaze on the pictures that graced the walls. He who had been thus bereaved went across seas to distant countries, from which his tenantry, for three springs, expected his return; but their expectations were never realised, for he died abroad. His remains were brought home to Scotland, according to a request in his will, to be laid by those of his wife; and now they rest together, beside the same simple Monument.

THE LOVER'S LAST VISIT.

THE window of the lonely cottage of Hilltop was beaming far above the highest birchwood, seeming to travellers at a distance in the long valley below, who knew it not, to be a star in the sky. A bright fire was in the kitchen of that small tenement; the floor was washed, swept, and sanded, and not a footstep had marked its perfect neatness; a small table was covered, near the ingle, with a snow-white cloth, on which was placed a frugal evening meal; and in happy but pensive mood sat there all alone the Woodcutter's only daughter, a comely and gentle creature, if not beautiful; such an one as diffuses pleasure round her in the hay-field, and serenity over the seat in which she sits attentively on the Sabbath, listening to the word of God, or joining with mellow voice in His praise and worship. On this night she expected a visit from her lover, that they might fix their marriage-day; and her parents, satisfied and happy that their child was about to be wedded to a respectable shepherd, had gone to pay a visit to their nearest neighbour in the glen.

A feeble and hesitating knock was at the door, not like the glad and joyful touch of a lover's hand; and cautiously opening it, Mary Robinson beheld a female figure wrapped up in a cloak, with her face concealed in a black bonnet. The stranger, whoever she might be, seemed wearied and worn out, and her feet bore witness to a long day's travel across the marshy mountains. Although she could scarcely help considering her an unwelcome visitor at such an hour, yet Mary had too much sweetness of disposition—too much humanity, not to request her to step forward into the hut; for it seemed as if the wearied woman had lost her way, and had come towards the shining window to be put right upon her journey to the low country.

The stranger took off her bonnet on reaching the fire; and Mary Robinson beheld the face of one whom, in youth, she had tenderly loved; although, for some years past, the distance at which they lived from each other had kept them from meeting, and only a letter or two, written in their simple way, had given them a few notices of each other's existence. And now Mary had opportunity, in the first speechless gaze of recognition, to mark the altered face of her friend, —and her heart was touched with an ignorant compassion. "For mercy's sake! sit down, Sarah! and tell me what evil has befallen you; for you are as white as a ghost. Fear not to confide anything to my bosom; we have herded sheep together on the lonesome braes —we have stripped the bark together in the more lonesome woods; —we have played, laughed, sung, danced together;—we have talked merrily and gaily, but innocently enough surely, of sweethearts together; and, Sarah, graver thoughts, too, have we shared, for when your poor brother died away like a frosted flower, I wept as if I had been his sister; nor can I ever be so happy in this world as to forget him. Tell me, my friend, why are you here? and why is your sweet face so ghastly?"

The heart of this unexpected visitor died within her at these kind and affectionate inquiries. For she had come on an errand that was likely to dash the joy from that happy countenance. Her heart upbraided her with the meanness of the purpose for which she had paid this visit; but that was only a passing thought; for was she, innocent and free from sin, to submit, not only to desertion, but to disgrace, and not trust herself and her wrongs, and her hopes of redress, to her whom she loved as a sister, and whose generous nature, she well knew, not even love, the changer of so many things, could change utterly; though, indeed, it might render it colder than of old to the anguish of a female friend?

"Oh! Mary, I must speak—yet must my words make you grieve, far less for me than for yourself. Wretch that I am—I bring evil tidings into the dwelling of my dearest friend! These ribbons—they are worn for his sake—they become well, as he thinks, the auburn of your bonny hair;—that blue gown is wore to-night because he likes it;—but, Mary, will you curse me to my face, when I declare before the God that made us, that that man is pledged unto me by all that is sacred between mortal creatures; and that I have here in my bosom written promises and oaths of love from him who, I was this morning told, is in a few days to be thy husband? Turn me out of the hut now if you choose, and let me, if you choose, die of hunger and fatigue in the woods where we have so often walked together; for such death would be mercy to me, in comparison with your marriage with him who is mine for ever, if there be a God who heeds the oaths of the creatures He has made."

Mary Robinson had led a happy life, but a life of quiet thoughts, tranquil hopes, and meek desires. Tenderly and truly did she love the man to whom she was now betrothed; but it was because she had thought him gentle, manly, upright, sincere, and one that feared God. His character was unimpeached,—to her his behaviour had always been fond, affectionate, and respectful; that he was a fine-looking man, and could show himself among the best of the country round at church, and market, and fair-day, she saw and felt with pleasure and with pride. But in the heart of this poor, humble, contented, and pious girl, love was not a violent passion, but an affection sweet and profound. She looked forward to her marriage with a joyful sedateness, knowing that she would have to toil for her family, if blest with children; but happy in the thought of keeping her husband's house clean, of preparing his frugal meals, and welcoming him when wearied at night to her faithful, and affectionate, and grateful bosom.

At first, perhaps, a slight flush of anger towards Sarah tinged her cheek; then followed in quick succession, or all blended together in one sickening pang, fear, disappointment, the sense of wrong, and the cruel pain of disesteeming and despising one on whom her heart had rested with all its best and purest affections. But though there was a keen struggle between many feelings in her heart, her resolution was formed during that very conflict; and she said within herself, "If it be even so, neither will I be so unjust as to deprive poor

Sarah of the man who ought to marry her, nor will I be so mean and low-spirited, poor as I am, and dear as he has been unto me, as to become his wife."

While these thoughts were calmly passing in the soul of this magnanimous girl, all her former affection for Sarah revived; and, as she sighed for herself, she wept aloud for her friend. "Be quiet, be quiet, Sarah, and sob not so as if your heart were breaking. It need not be thus with you. Oh! sob not so sair! You surely have not walked in this one day from the heart of the parish of Montrath?" —"I have indeed done so, and I am as weak as the wreathed snaw. God knows, little matter if I should die away; for, after all, I fear he will never think of me for his wife, and you, Mary, will lose a husband with whom you would have been happy. I feel, after all, that I must appear a mean wretch in your eyes."

There was silence between them; and Mary Robinson, looking at the clock, saw that it wanted only about a quarter of an hour from the time of tryst. "Give me the oaths and promises you mentioned, out of your bosom, Sarah, that I may show them to Gabriel when he comes. And once more I promise, by all the sunny and all the snowy days we have sat together in the same plaid on the hill-side, or in the lonesome charcoal plots and nests o' green in the woods, that if my Gabriel—did I say my Gabriel?—has forsaken you and deceived me thus, never shall his lips touch mine again—never shall he put ring on my finger—never shall this head lie in his bosom—no, never, never; notwithstanding all the happy, too happy hours and days I have been with him, near or at a distance—on the corn-rig—among the meadow-hay—in the singing-school—at harvest-home—in this room, and in God's own house. So help me God, but I will keep this vow!"

Poor Sarah told, in a few hurried words, the story of her love and desertion—how Gabriel, whose business as a shepherd often took him into Montrath parish, had wooed her, and fixed everything about their marriage, nearly a year ago. But that he had become causelessly jealous of a young man whom she scarcely knew; had accused her of want of virtue, and for many months had never once come to see her. "This morning, for the first time, I heard for a certainty, from one who knew Gabriel well and all his concerns, that the banns had been proclaimed in the church between him and you; and that in a day or two you were to be married. And though I felt drowning, I determined to make a struggle for my life—for oh! Mary, Mary, my heart is not like your heart; it wants your wisdom, your meekness, your piety; and if I am to lose Gabriel, will I destroy my miserable life, and face the wrath of God sitting in judgment upon sinners."

At this burst of passion Sarah hid her face with her hands, as if sensible that she had committed blasphemy. Mary, seeing her wearied, hungry, thirsty, and feverish, spoke to her in the most soothing manner, led her into the little parlour called the Spence, then removed into it the table, with the oaten cakes, butter, and milk; and telling her to take some refreshment, and then lie down

in the bed, but on no account to leave the room till called for, gave her a sisterly kiss, and left her. In a few minutes the outer door opened, and Gabriel entered.

The lover said, "How is my sweet Mary?" with a beaming countenance; and gently drawing her to his bosom, he kissed her cheek. Mary did not—could not—wished not—at once to release herself from his enfolding arms. Gabriel had always treated her as the woman who was to be his wife; and though, at this time, her heart knew its own bitterness, yet she repelled not endearments that were so lately delightful, and suffered him to take her almost in his arms to their accustomed seat. He held her hand in his, and began to speak in his usual kind and affectionate language. Kind and affectionate it was, for though he ought not to have done so, he loved her, as he thought, better than his life. Her heart could not, in one small short hour, forget a whole year of bliss. She could not yet fling away with her own hand what, only a few minutes ago, seemed to her the hope of paradise. Her soul sickened within her, and she wished that she were dead, or never had been born.

"O Gabriel! Gabriel! well indeed have I loved you; nor will I say, after all that has passed between us, that you are not deserving, after all, of a better love than mine. Vain were it to deny my love, either to you or to my own soul. But look me in the face—be not wrathful—think not to hide the truth either from yourself or me, for that now is impossible—but tell me solemnly, as you shall answer to God at the judgment-day, if you know any reason why I must not be your wedded wife." She kept her mild moist eyes fixed upon him; but he hung down his head, and uttered not a word, for he was guilty before her, before his own soul, and before God.

"Gabriel, never could we have been happy; for you often, often told me, that all the secrets of your heart were known unto me, yet never did you tell me this. How could you desert the poor innocent creature that loved you; and how could you use me so, who loved you perhaps as well as she, but whose heart God will teach, not to forget you, for that may I never do, but to think on you with that friendship and affection which innocently I can bestow upon you, when you are Sarah's husband. For, Gabriel, I have this night sworn, not in anger or passion—no, no—but in sorrow and pity for another's wrongs—in sorrow also, deny it will I not, for my own—to look on you from this hour, as on one whose life is to be led apart from my life, and whose love must never more meet with my love. Speak not unto me—look not on me with beseeching eyes. Duty and religion forbid us ever to be man and wife. But you know there is one, besides me, whom you loved before you loved me, and therefore, it may be, better too; and that she loves you, and is faithful, as if God had made you one, I say without fear—I who have known her since she was a child, although, fatally for the peace of us both, we have long lived apart. Sarah is in the house, and I will bring her unto you in tears, but not tears of penitence, for she is as innocent of that sin as I am, who now speak."

Mary went into the little parlour, and led Sarah forward in her hand. Despairing as she had been, yet when she had heard from poor Mary's voice speaking so fervently, that Gabriel had come, and that her friend was interceding in her behalf—the poor girl had arranged her hair in a small looking-glass—tied it up with a ribbon which Gabriel had given her, and put into the breast of her gown a little gilt brooch, that contained locks of their blended hair. Pale but beautiful, for Sarah Pringle was the fairest girl in all the country, she advanced with a flush on that paleness of reviving hope, injured pride, and love that was ready to forgive all and forget all, so that once again she could be restored to the place in his heart that she had lost. "What have I ever done, Gabriel, that you should fling me from you? May my soul never live by the atonement of my Saviour, if I am not innocent of that sin, yea, of all distant thought of that sin with which you, even you, have in your hard-heartedness charged me. Look me in the face, Gabriel, and think of all I have been unto you, and if you say that before God, and in your own soul, you believe me guilty, then will I go away out into the dark night, and, long before morning, my troubles will be at an end."

Truth was not only in her fervent and simple words, but in the tone of her voice, the colour of her face, and the light of her eyes. Gabriel had long shut up his heart against her. At first, he had doubted her virtue, and that doubt gradually weakened his affection. At last he tried to believe her guilty, or to forget her altogether, when his heart turned to Mary Robinson, and he thought of making her his wife. His injustice—his wickedness—his baseness—which he had so long concealed, in some measure, from himself, by a dim feeling of wrong done him, and afterwards by the pleasure of a new love, now appeared to him as they were, and without disguise. Mary took Sarah's hand and placed it within that of her contrite lover, for had the tumult of conflicting passions allowed him to know his own soul, such at that moment he surely was, saying with a voice as composed as the eyes with which she looked upon them, "I restore you to each other; and I already feel the comfort of being able to do my duty. I will be bride's-maid. And I now implore the blessing of God upon your marriage. Gabriel, your betrothed will sleep this night in my bosom. We will think of you, better, perhaps, than you deserve. It is not for me to tell you what you have to repent of. Let us all three pray for each other this night, and evermore when we are on our knees before our Maker. The old people will soon be at home. Good-night, Gabriel." He kissed Sarah—and, giving Mary a look of shame, humility, and reverence, he went home to meditation and repentance.

It was now Midsummer; and before the harvest had been gathered in throughout the higher valleys, or the sheep brought from the mountain fold, Gabriel and Sarah were man and wife. Time passed on, and a blooming family cheered their board and fireside. Nor did Mary Robinson, the Flower of the Forest (for so the Wood-cutter's daughter was often called), pass her life in single blessedness.

She, too, became a wife and mother; and the two families, who lived at last on adjacent farms, were remarkable for mutual affection, throughout all the parish, and more than one intermarriage took place between them, at a time when the worthy parents had almost entirely forgotten the trying incident of their youth.

THE MINISTER'S WIDOW.

The dwelling of the Minister's Widow stood within a few miles of the beautiful village of Castle-Holm, about a hundred low-roofed houses that had taken the name of the parish of which they were the little romantic capital. Two small regular rows of cottages faced each other, on the gentle acclivity of a hill, separated by a broomy common of rich pasturage, through which hurried a translucent loch-born rivulet, with here and there its shelves and waterfalls overhung by the alder or weeping birch. Each straw-roofed abode, snug and merry as a beehive, had behind it a few roods of garden ground; so that, in spring, the village was covered with a fragrant cloud of blossoms on the pear, apple, and plum trees; and in autumn was brightened with golden fruitage. In the heart of the village stood the manse, and in it had she who was now a widow passed twenty years of privacy and peace. On the death of her husband, she had retired with her family—three boys—to the pleasant cottage which they now inhabited. It belonged to the old lady of the Castle, who was patroness of the parish, and who accepted from the minister's widow of a mere trifle as a nominal rent. On approaching the village, strangers always fixed upon Sunnyside for the Manse itself, for an air of serenity and retirement brooded over it as it looked out from below its sheltering elms, and the farmyard with its corn-stack, marking the homestead of the agricultural tenant, was there wanting. A neat gravel-walk winded away, without a weed, from the white gate by the road-side, through lilacs and laburnums; and the unruffled and unbroken order of all the breathing things that grew around, told that a quiet and probably small family lived within those beautiful boundaries.

The change from the Manse to Sunnyside had been with the widow a change from happiness to resignation. Her husband had died of a consumption; and for nearly a year she had known that his death was inevitable. Both of them had lived in the spirit of that Christianity which he had preached; and therefore the last year they passed together, in spite of the many bitter tears which she who was to be the survivor shed when none were by to see, was perhaps on the whole the best deserving of the name of happiness of the twenty that had passed over their earthly union. To the dying man death had lost all his terrors. He sat beside his wife, with his bright hollow eyes and emaciated frame, among the balmy shades of his garden, and spoke with fervour of the many tender

mercies God had vouchsafed to them here, and of the promises made to all who believed in the Gospel. They did not sit together to persuade, to convince, or to uphold each other's faith, for they believed in the things that were unseen, just as they believed in the beautiful blossomed arbour that then contained them in its shading silence. Accordingly, when the hour was at hand in which he was to render up his spirit into the hand of God, he was like a grateful and wearied man falling into a sleep. His widow closed his eyes with her own hands, nor was her soul then disquieted within her. In a few days she heard the bell tolling, and from her sheltered window looked out, and followed the funeral with streaming eyes, but an unweeping heart. With a calm countenance and humble voice she left and bade farewell to the sweet Manse, where she had so long been happy; and as her three beautiful boys, with faces dimmed by natural grief, but brightened by natural gladness, glided before her steps, she shut the gate of her new dwelling with an undisturbed soul, and moved her lips in silent thanksgiving to the God of the fatherless and the widow.

Her three boys, each one year older than the other, grew in strength and beauty, the pride and flower of the parish. In school they were quiet and composed; but in play-hours they bounded in their glee together like young deer, and led the sportful flock in all their excursions through wood or over moor. They resembled, in features and in voice, both of their gentle parents; but nature had moulded to quite another character their joyful and impetuous souls. When sitting or walking with their mother, they subdued their spirits down to suit her equable and gentle contentment, and behaved towards her with a delicacy and thoughtfulness which made her heart to sing for joy. So too did they sit in the kirk on Sabbath, and during all that day the fountain of their joy seemed to subside and to lie still. They knew to stand solemnly with their mother now and then, on the calm summer evenings, beside their father's grave. They remembered well his pale kind face—his feeble walk—his bending frame—his hand laid in blessing on their young heads—and the last time they ever heard him speak. The glad boys had not forgotten their father; and that they proved by their piety unto her whom most on earth had their father loved. But their veins were filled with youth, health, and the electricity of joy; and they carried without and within the house such countenances as at any time coming upon their mother's eyes on a sudden, were like a torch held up in the dim melancholy of a mist, diffusing cheerfulness and elevation.

Years passed on. Although the youngest was but a boy, the eldest stood on the verge of manhood, for he had entered his seventeenth year, and was bold, straight, and tall, with a voice deepening in its tone, a graver expression round the gladness of his eyes, and a sullen mass of coal-black hair hanging over the smooth whiteness of his open forehead. But why describe the three beautiful brothers? They knew that there was a world lying at a distance that called upon them to leave the fields, and woods, and streams, and lochs of

Castle-Holm; and, born and bred in peace as they had been, their restless hearts were yet all on fire, and they burned to join a life of danger, strife, and tumult. No doubt it gave their mother a sad heart to think that all her three boys, who she knew loved her so tenderly, could leave her all alone, and rush into the far-off world. But who shall curb nature? Who ought to try to curb it when its bent is strong? She reasoned awhile, and tried to dissuade; but it was in vain. Then she applied to her friends; and the widow of the minister of Castle-Holm, retired as his life had been, was not without friends of rank and power. In one year her three boys had their wish;—in one year they left Sunnyside, one after the other: William to India, Edward to Spain, and Harry to a man-of-war.

Still was the widow happy. The house that so often used to be ringing with joy, was now indeed too, too silent; and that utter noiselessness sometimes made her heart sick when sitting by herself in the solitary room. But by nature she was a gentle, meek, resigned, and happy being; and had she even been otherwise, the sorrow she had suffered, and the spirit of religion which her whole life had instilled, must have reconciled her to what was now her lot. Great cause had she to be glad. Far away as India was, and seemingly more remote in her imagination, loving letters came from her son there in almost every ship that sailed for Britain; and if at times something delayed them, she came to believe in the necessity of such delays, and, without quaking, waited till the blessed letter did in truth appear. Of Edward, in Spain, she often heard—though for him she suffered more than for the others. Not that she loved him better, for, like three stars, each possessed alike the calm heaven of her heart; but he was with Wellington, and the regiment in which he served seemed to be conspicuous in all skirmishes, and in every battle. Henry, her youngest boy, who left her before he had finished his fourteenth year, she often heard from; his ship sometimes put into port; and once, to the terror and consternation of her loving and yearning heart, the young midshipman stood before her, with a laughing voice, on the floor of the parlour, and rushed into her arms. He had got leave of absence for a fortnight; and proudly, although sadly too, did she look on her dear boy when he was sitting in the kirk with his uniform on, and his war-weapons by his side—a fearless and beautiful stripling, on whom many an eye was insensibly turned even during service. And, to be sure, when the congregation were dismissed, and the young sailor came smiling out into the churchyard, never was there such a shaking of hands seen before. The old men blessed the gallant boy—many of the mothers looked at him not without tears; and the young maidens, who had heard that he had been in a bloody engagement, and once nearly shipwrecked, gazed upon him with unconscious blushes, and bosoms that beat with innocent emotion. A blessed week it was indeed that he was then with his mother; and never before had Sunnyside seemed so well to deserve its name.

To love, to fear, and to obey God, was the rule of this widow's

life; and the time was near at hand when she was to be called upon to practise it in every silent, secret, darkest corner and recess of her afflicted spirit. Her eldest son, William, fell in storming a fort in India, as he led the forlorn-hope. He was killed dead in a moment, and fell into the trench with all his lofty plumes. Edward was found dead at Talavera, with the colours of his regiment tied round his body. And the ship in which Henry was on board, that never would have struck her flag to any human power sailing on the sea, was driven by a storm on a reef of rocks—went to pieces during the night—and of eight hundred men, not fifty were saved. Of that number Henry was not; but his body was found next day on the sand, along with those of many of the crew, and buried, as it deserved, with all honours, and in a place where few but sailors slept.

In one month, one little month, did the tidings of the three deaths reach Sunnyside. A government letter informed her of William's death in India, and added, that, on account of the distinguished character of the young soldier, a small pension would be settled on his mother. Had she been starving of want, instead of blessed with competence, that word would have had then no meaning to her ear. Yet true it is—that a human—an earthly pride—cannot be utterly extinguished, even by severest anguish, in a mother's heart, yea, even although her best hopes are garnered up in heaven; and the weeping widow could not help feeling it now, when, with the black wax below her eyes, she read how her dead boy had not fallen in the service of an ungrateful state. A few days afterwards a letter came from himself, written in the highest spirits and tenderest affection. His mother looked at every word—every letter—every dash of the pen;—and still one thought—one thought only, was in her soul—"the living hand that traced these lines, where, what is it now?" But this was the first blow only; ere the new moon was visible, the widow knew that she was altogether childless.

It was in a winter hurricane that her youngest boy had perished; and the names of those whose health had hitherto been remembered at every festal Christmas, throughout all the parish, from the Castle to the humblest hut, were now either suppressed within the heart, or pronounced with a low voice and a sigh. During three months, Sunnyside looked almost as if uninhabited. Yet the smoke from one chimney told that the childless widow was sitting alone at her fireside; and when her only servant was spoken to at church, or on the village-green, and asked how her mistress was bearing these dispensations, the answer was, that her health seemed little, if at all impaired, and that she talked of coming to divine service in a few weeks, if her strength would permit. She had been seen through the leafless hedge standing at the parlour window, and had motioned with her hand to a neighbour, who, in passing, had uncovered his head. Her weekly bounty to several poor and bed-ridden persons had never suffered but one week's intermission. It was always sent to them on Saturday night; and it was on a Saturday night that

all the parish had been thrown into tears, with the news that Henry's ship had been wrecked, and the brave boy drowned. On that evening she had forgotten the poor.

But now the Spring had put forth her tender buds and blossoms —had strewn the black ground under the shrubs with flowers, and was bringing up the soft, tender, and beautiful green over the awakening face of the earth. There was a revival of the spirit of life and gladness over the garden, and the one encircling field of Sunnyside; and so likewise, under the grace of God, was there a revival of the soul that had been sorrowing within its concealment. On the first sweet dewy Sabbath of May, the widow was seen closing behind her the little white gate, which for some months her hand had not touched. She gave a gracious, but mournful smile, to all her friends, as she passed on through the midst of them along with the minister, who had joined her on entering the churchyard; and although it was observed that she turned pale as she sat down in her pew, with the Bibles and Psalm-books that had belonged to her sons lying before her, as they themselves had enjoined when they went away, yet her face brightened even as her heart began to burn within her at the simple music of the Psalm. The prayers of the congregation had some months before been requested for her, as a person in great distress; and, during service, the young minister, according to her desire, now said a few simple words, that intimated to the congregation that the childless widow was, through his lips, returning thanks to Almighty God, for that he had not forsaken her in her trouble, but sent resignation and peace.

From that day she was seen, as before, in her house, in her garden, along the many pleasant walks all about the village; and in the summer evenings, though not so often as formerly, in the dwellings of her friends, both high and low. From her presence a more gentle manner seemed to be breathed over the rude, and a more heartfelt delicacy over the refined. Few had suffered as she had suffered; all her losses were such as could be understood, felt, and wept over by all hearts; and all boisterousness or levity of joy would have seemed an outrage on her, who, sad and melancholy herself, yet wished all around her happy, and often lighted up her countenance with a grateful smile at the sight of that pleasure which she could not but observe to be softened, sobered, and subdued for her sake.

Such was the account of her, her sorrows, and her resignation, which I received on the first visit I paid to a family near Castle-Holm, after the final consummation of her grief. Well known to me had all the dear boys been; their father and mine had been labourers in the same vineyard; and as I had always been a welcome visitor, when a boy, at the Manse of Castle-Holm, so had I been, when a man, at Sunnyside. Last time I had been there, it was during the holidays, and I had accompanied the three boys on their fishing excursions to the lochs in the moor; and in the evenings pursued with them their humble and useful studies. So I could not leave Castle-Holm without visiting Sunnyside, although my

heart misgave me, and I wished I could have delayed it till another summer.

I sent word that I was coming to see her, and I found her sitting in that well-known little parlour where I had partaken the pleasure of so many merry evenings, with those whose laughter was now extinguished. We sat for a while together speaking of ordinary topics, and then utterly silent. But the restraint she had imposed upon herself she either thought unnecessary any longer, or felt it to be impossible; and rising up, went to a little desk, from which she brought forth three miniatures, and laid them down upon the table before us, saying, "Behold the faces of my three dead boys!"

So bright, breathing, and alive did they appear, that for a moment I felt impelled to speak to them, and to whisper their names. She beheld my emotion, and said unto me, "Oh! could you believe that they are all dead! Does not that smile on Willy's face seem as if it were immortal! Do not Edward's sparkling eyes look so bright as if the mists of death could never have overshadowed them! and think—oh! think, that ever Henry's golden hair should have been draggled in the brine, and filled full, full, I doubt not, of the soiling sand!"

I put the senseless images one by one to my lips, and kissed their foreheads—for dearly had I loved these three brothers; and then I shut them up and removed them to another part of the room. I wished to speak, but I could not; and, looking on the face of her who was before me, I knew that her grief would find utterance, and that not until she had unburdened her heart could it be restored to repose.

"They would tell you, sir, that I bear my trials well; but it is not so. Many, many unresigned and ungrateful tears has my God to forgive in me, a poor, weak, and repining worm. Almost every day, almost every night, do I weep before these silent and beautiful phantoms; and when I wipe away the breath and mist of tears from their faces, there are they smiling continually upon me! Oh! death is a shocking thought, when it is linked in love with creatures so young as these! More insupportable is gushing tenderness, than even dry despair; and, methinks, I could bear to live without them, and never to see them more, if I could only cease to pity them! But that can never be. It is for them I weep, not for myself. If they were to be restored to life, would I not lie down with thankfulness into the grave? William and Edward were struck down, and died, as they thought, in glory and triumph. Death to them was merciful. But who can know, although they may try to dream of it in horror, what the youngest of them, my sweet Harry, suffered, through that long dark howling night of snow, when the ship was going to pieces on the rocks!"

That last dismal thought held her for a while silent; and some tears stood in drops on her eyelashes, but seemed again to be absorbed. Her heart appeared unable to cling to the horrors of the shipwreck, although it coveted them; and her thoughts reverted to other objects. "I walk often into the rooms where they used to

sleep, and look on their beds till I think I see their faces lying with shut eyes on their pillows. Early in the morning, do I often think I hear them singing—I awaken from troubled unrest, as if the knock of their sportive hands were at my door summoning me to rise. All their stated hours of study and of play—when they went to school and returned from it—when they came in to meals—when they said their prayers—when they went leaping at night to bed as lightsomely, after all the day's fatigue, as if they had just risen. Oh!—Sir—at all these times, and many, and many a time besides these, do I think of them whom you loved."

While thus she kept indulging the passion of her grief, she observed the tears I could no longer conceal; and the sight of my sorrow seemed to give, for a time, a loftier character to hers, as if my weakness made her aware of her own, and she had become conscious of the character of her vain lamentations. "Yet, why should I so bitterly weep? Pain had not troubled them—passion had not disturbed them—vice had not polluted them. May I not say, 'My children are in heaven with their father'—and ought I not, therefore, to dry up all these foolish tears now and for evermore?"

Composure was suddenly shed over her countenance, like gentle sunlight over a cheerless day, and she looked around the room as if searching for some pleasant objects that eluded her sight. "See," said she, "yonder are all their books, arranged just as Henry arranged them on his unexpected visit. Alas! too many of them are about the troubles and battles of the sea! But it matters not now. You are looking at that drawing. It was done by himself—that is the ship he was so proud of, sailing in sunshine and a pleasant breeze. Another ship, indeed, was she soon after, when she lay upon the reef! But as for the books, I take them out of their places and dust them, and return them to their places, every week. I used to read to my boys, sitting round my knees, out of many of these books, before they could read themselves—but now I never peruse them, for their cheerful stories are not for me. But there is one book I do read, and without it I should long ago have been dead. The more the heart suffers, the more does it understand that book. Never do I read a single chapter, without feeling assured of something more awful in our nature than I felt before. My own heart misgives me; my own soul betrays me; all my comforts desert me in a panic; but never yet once did I read one whole page of the New Testament that I did not know that the eye of God is on all His creatures, and on me like the rest, though my husband and all my sons are dead, and I may have many years yet to live alone on the earth."

After this we walked out into the little avenue, now dark with the deep rich shadows of summer beauty. We looked at that beauty, and spoke of the surpassing brightness of the weather during all June, and advancing July. It is not in nature always to be sad; and the remembrance of all her melancholy and even miserable confessions was now like an uncertain echo, as I beheld a placid smile on her face, a smile of such perfect resignation, that it might not falsely

be called a smile of joy. We stood at the little white gate; and, with a gentle voice, that perfectly accorded with that expression, she bade God bless me; and then with composed steps, and now and then turning up, as she walked along, the massy flower-branches of the laburnum, as, bent with their load of beauty, they trailed upon the ground, she disappeared into that retirement which, notwithstanding all I had seen and heard, I could not but think deserved almost to be called happy, in a world which even the most thoughtless know is a world of sorrow.

THE SNOW-STORM.

In summer there is beauty in the wildest moors of Scotland, and the wayfaring man who sits down for an hour's rest beside some little spring that flows unheard through the brightened moss and water-cresses, feels his weary heart revived by the silent, serene, and solitary prospect. On every side sweet sunny spots of verdure smile towards him from among the melancholy heather—unexpectedly in the solitude a stray sheep, it may be with its lambs, starts half-alarmed at his motionless figure—insects, large, bright, and beautiful, come careering by him through the desert air—nor does the Wild want its own songsters, the grey linnet, fond of the blooming furze, and now and then the lark mounting up to Heaven above the summits of the green pastoral hills. During such a sunshiny hour, the lonely cottage on the waste seems to stand in a paradise: and as he rises to pursue his journey, the traveller looks back and blesses it with a mingled emotion of delight and envy. There, thinks he, abide the children of Innocence and Contentment, the two most benign spirits that watch over human life.

But other thoughts arise in the mind of him who may chance to journey through the same scene in the desolation of Winter. The cold bleak sky girdles the moor as with a belt of ice—life is frozen in air and on earth. The silence is not of repose but extinction—and should a solitary human dwelling catch his eye, half buried in the snow, he is sad for the sake of them whose destiny it is to abide far from the cheerful haunts of men, shrouded up in melancholy, by poverty held in thrall, or pining away in unvisited and untended disease.

But, in good truth, the heart of human life is but imperfectly discovered from its countenance; and before we can know what the summer, or what the winter yields for enjoyment or trial to our country's peasantry, we must have conversed with them in their fields and by their firesides; and made ourselves acquainted with the powerful ministry of the Seasons, not over those objects alone that feed the eye and the imagination, but over all the incidents, occupations, and events, that modify or constitute the existence of the poor.

I have a short and simple story to tell of the winter life of the moorland cottager—a story but of one evening—with few events and no single catastrophe—which may haply please those hearts whose delight it is to think on the humble under-plots that are carrying on in the great Drama of Life.

Two cottagers, husband and wife, were sitting by their cheerful peat-fire one winter evening, in a small lonely hut on the edge of a wide moor, at some miles' distance from any other habitation. There had been, at one time, several huts of the same kind erected close together, and inhabited by families of the poorest class of day-labourers, who found work among the distant farms, and at night returned to dwellings which were rent-free, with their little gardens won from the waste. But one family after another had dwindled away, and the turf-built huts had all fallen into ruins, except one that had always stood in the centre of this little solitary village, with its summer-walls covered with the richest honeysuckles, and in the midst of the brightest of all the gardens. It alone now sent up its smoke into the clear winter sky—and its little end-window, now lighted up, was the only ground-star that shone towards the belated traveller, if any such ventured to cross, on a winter night, a scene so dreary and desolate. The affairs of the small household were all arranged for the night. The little rough pony that had drawn in a sledge, from the heart of the Black-moss, the fuel by whose blaze the cotters were now sitting cheerily, and the little Highland cow, whose milk enabled them to live, were standing amicably together, under cover of a rude shed, of which one side was formed by the peat-stack, and which was at once byre, and stable, and hen-roost. Within, the clock ticked cheerfully as the fire-light reached its old oak-wood case, across the yellow-sanded floor—and a small round table stood between, covered with a snow-white cloth, on which were milk and oat-cakes, the morning, mid-day, and evening meal of these frugal and contented cotters. The spades and the mattocks of the labourer were collected into one corner, and showed that the succeeding day was the blessed Sabbath —while on the wooden chimney-piece was seen lying an open Bible ready for family worship.

The father and the mother were sitting together without opening their lips, but with their hearts overflowing with happiness, for on this Saturday night they were, every minute, expecting to hear at the latch the hand of their only daughter, a maiden of about fifteen years, who was at service with a farmer over the hills. This dutiful child was, as they knew, to bring home to them "her sair-won penny fee," a pittance which, in the beauty of her girlhood, she earned singing at her work, and which, in the benignity of that sinless time, she would pour with tears into the bosoms she so dearly loved. Forty shillings a-year were all the wages of sweet Hannah Lee—but though she wore at her labour a tortoise-shell comb in her auburn hair, and though in the kirk none were more becomingly arrayed than she, one-half, at least, of her earnings were to be reserved for the holiest of all purposes; and her kind innocent heart was gladdened when

she looked on the little purse that was, on the long-expected Saturday night, to be taken from her bosom, and put, with a blessing, into the hand of her father, now growing old at his daily toils.

Of such a child the happy cotters were thinking in their silence. And well, indeed, might they be called happy. It is at that sweet season that filial piety is most beautiful. Their own Hannah had just outgrown the mere unthinking gladness of childhood, but had not yet reached that time when inevitable selfishness mixes with the pure current of love. She had begun to think on what her affectionate heart had felt so long; and when she looked on the pale face and bending frame of her mother, on the deepening wrinkles and whitening hairs of her father, often would she lie weeping for their sakes on her midnight bed—and wish that she were beside them as they slept, that she might kneel down and kiss them, and mention their names over and over again in her prayer. The parents whom before she had only loved, her expanding heart now also venerated. With gushing tenderness was now mingled a holy fear and an awful reverence. She had discerned the relation in which she, an only child, stood to her poor parents, now that they were getting old, and there was not a passage in Scripture that spake of parents or of children, from Joseph sold into slavery to Mary weeping below the Cross, that was not written, never to be obliterated, on her uncorrupted heart.

The father rose from his seat, and went to the door to look out into the night. The stars were in thousands, and the full moon was risen. It was almost light as day, and the snow that seemed encrusted with diamonds, was so hardened by the frost, that his daughter's homeward feet would leave no mark on its surface. He had been toiling all day among the distant Castle-woods, and, stiff and wearied as he now was, he was almost tempted to go to meet his child; but his wife's kind voice dissuaded him, and, returning to the fireside, they began to talk of her whose image had been so long passing before them in their silence.

"She is growing up to be a bonny lassie," said the mother; "her long and weary attendance on me during my fever last spring kept her down a while—but now she is sprouting fast and fair as a lily, and may the blessing of God be as dew and as sunshine to our sweet flower all the days she bloometh upon this earth."—"Ay, Agnes," replied the father, "we are not very old yet—though we are getting older—and a few years will bring her to woman's estate, and what thing on this earth, think ye, human or brute, would ever think of injuring her? Why, I was speaking about her yesterday to the minister, as he was riding by, and he told me that none answered at the Examination in the Kirk so well as Hannah. Poor thing—I well think she has all the Bible by heart—indeed, she has read but little else—only some stories, too true ones, of the blessed martyrs, and some o' the auld sangs o' Scotland, in which there is nothing but what is good, and which, to be sure, she sings, God bless her, sweeter than any laverock." "Ay,—were we both to die this very night she would be happy. Not that she would forget us all the

days of her life. But have you not seen, husband, that God always makes the orphan happy? None so little lonesome as they! They come to make friends o' all the bonny and sweet things in the world around them, and all the kind hearts in the world make friends o' them. They come to know that God is more especially the Father o' them on earth whose parents he has taken up to heaven; and therefore it is that they for whom so many have fears, fear not at all for themselves, but go dancing and singing along like children whose parents are both alive. Would it not be so with our dear Hannah? So douce and thoughtful a child—but never sad nor miserable—ready, it is true, to shed tears for little, but as ready to dry them up and break out into smiles! I know not why it is, husband, but this night my heart warms towards her beyond usual. The moon and stars are at this moment looking down upon her, and she looking up to them, as she is glinting homewards over the snow. I wish she were but here, and taking the comb out o' her bonny hair and letting it all fall down in clusters before the fire, to melt away the cranreuch!"

While the parents were thus speaking of their daughter, a loud sugh of wind came suddenly over the cottage, and the leafless ash-tree under whose shelter it stood, creaked and groaned dismally as it passed by. The father started up, and, going again to the door, saw that a sudden change had come over the face of the night. The moon had nearly disappeared, and was just visible in a dim, yellow, glimmering den in the sky. All the remote stars were obscured, and only one or two were faintly seen in a sky that half an hour before was perfectly cloudless, but that was now driving with rack, and mist, and sleet, the whole atmosphere being in commotion. He stood for a single moment to observe the direction of this unforeseen storm, and then hastily asked for his staff. "I thought I had been more weather-wise—a storm is coming down from the Cairnbrae-hawse, and we shall have nothing but a wild night. He then whistled on his dog—an old sheep-dog, too old for its former labours—and set off to meet his daughter, who might then, for aught he knew, be crossing the Black-moss. The mother accompanied her husband to the door, and took a long frightened look at the angry sky. As she kept gazing, it became still more terrible. The last shred of blue was extinguished—the wind went whirling in roaring eddies, and great flakes of snow circled about in the middle air, whether drifted up from the ground, or driven down from the clouds, the fear-stricken mother knew not, but she at least knew, that it seemed a night of danger, despair, and death. "Lord have mercy on us, James, what will become of our poor bairn!" But her husband heard not her words, for he was already out of sight in the snow-storm, and she was left to the terror of her own soul in that lonesome cottage.

Little Hannah Lee had left her master's house, soon as the rim of the great moon was seen by her eyes, that had been long anxiously watching it from the window, rising, like a joyful dream, over the gloomy mountain-tops; and all by herself she tripped along beneath the beauty of the silent heaven. Still as she kept ascending and

descending the knolls that lay in the bosom of the glen, she sang to herself a song, a hymn, or a psalm, without the accompaniment of the streams, now all silent in the frost; and ever and anon she stopped to try to count the stars that lay in some more beautiful part of the sky, or gazed on the constellations that she knew, and called them, in her joy, by the names they bore among the shepherds. There were none to hear her voice, or see her smiles, but the ear and eye of Providence. As on she glided, and took her looks from heaven, she saw her own little fireside—her parents waiting for her arrival—the Bible opened for worship—her own little room kept so neatly for her, with its mirror hanging by the window, in which to braid her hair by the morning light—her bed prepared for her by her mother's hand—the primroses in her garden peeping through the snow—old Tray, who ever welcomed her home with his dim white eyes—the pony and the cow;—friends all, and inmates of that happy household. So stepped she along, while the snow diamonds glittered around her feet, and the frost wove a wreath of lucid pearls round her forehead.

She had now reached the edge of the Black-moss, which lay half-way between her master's and her father's dwelling, when she heard a loud noise coming down Glen-Scrae, and in a few seconds she felt on her face some flakes of snow. She looked up the glen, and saw the snow-storm coming down fast as a flood. She felt no fears; but she ceased her song; and, had there been a human eye to look upon her there, it might have seen a shadow on her face. She continued her course, and felt bolder and bolder every step that brought her nearer to her parents' house. But the snow-storm had now reached the Black-moss, and the broad line of light that had lain in the direction of her home was soon swallowed up, and the child was in utter darkness. She saw nothing but the flakes of snow, interminably intermingled, and furiously wafted in the air, close to her head; she heard nothing but one wild, fierce, fitful howl. The cold became intense, and her little feet and hands were fast being benumbed into insensibility.

"It is a fearful change," muttered the child to herself; but still she did not fear, for she had been born in a moorland cottage, and lived all her days among the hardships of the hills. "What will become of the poor sheep!" thought she,—but still she scarcely thought of her own danger, for innocence, and youth, and joy, are slow to think of aught evil befalling themselves, and, thinking benignly of all living things, forget their own fear in their pity for others' sorrow. At last, she could no longer discern a single mark on the snow, either of human steps, or of sheep-track, or the foot-print of a wild-fowl. Suddenly, too, she felt out of breath and exhausted—and, shedding tears for herself at last, sank down in the snow.

It was now that her heart began to quake with fear. She remembered stories of shepherds lost in the snow—of a mother and a child frozen to death on that very moor—and, in a moment, she knew

that she was to die. Bitterly did the poor child weep, for death was terrible to her, who, though poor, enjoyed the bright little world of youth and innocence. The skies of heaven were dearer than she knew to her—so were the flowers of earth. She had been happy at her work, happy in her sleep,—happy in the kirk on Sabbath. A thousand thoughts had the solitary child,—and in her own heart was a spring of happiness, pure and undisturbed as any fount that sparkles unseen all the year through, in some quiet nook among the pastoral hills. But now there was to be an end of all this—she was to be frozen to death—and lie there till the thaw might come; and then her father would find her body, and carry it away to be buried in the kirkyard.

The tears were frozen on her cheeks as soon as shed—and scarcely had her little hands strength to clasp themselves together, as the thought of an overruling and merciful Lord came across her heart. Then, indeed, the fears of this religious child were calmed, and she heard without terror the plover's wailing cry, and the deep boom of the bittern sounding in the moss. "I will repeat the Lord's Prayer;" and, drawing her plaid more closely around her, she whispered, beneath its ineffectual cover,—"Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name—thy kingdom come—thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Had human aid been within fifty yards, it could have been of no avail—eye could not see her—ear could not hear her in that howling darkness. But that low prayer was heard in the centre of eternity—and that little sinless child was lying in the snow, beneath the all-seeing eye of God.

The maiden, having prayed to her Father in Heaven—then thought of her father on earth. Alas! they were not far separated! The father was lying but a short distance from his child; he too had sunk down in the drifting snow, after having, in less than an hour, exhausted all the strength of fear, pity, hope, despair, and resignation, that could rise in a father's heart blindly seeking to rescue his only child from death, thinking that one desperate exertion might enable them to perish in each other's arms. There they lay, within a stone's throw of each other, while a huge snow-drift was every moment piling itself up into a more insurmountable barrier between the dying parent and his dying child.

There was all this while a blazing fire in the cottage—a white-spread table—and beds prepared for the family to lie down in peace. Yet was she who sat therein more to be pitied than the old man and the child stretched upon the snow. "I will not go to seek them—that would be tempting Providence, and wilfully putting out the lamp of life. No! I will abide here, and pray for their souls!" Then as she knelt down, looked she at the useless fire burning away so cheerfully, when all she loved might be dying of cold—and, unable to bear the thought, she shrieked out a prayer, as if she might pierce the sky up to the very throne of God, and send with it her own miserable soul to plead before Him for the deliverance of her child and husband. She then fell down in blessed forgetfulness of

all trouble, in the midst of the solitary cheerfulness of that bright-burning hearth—and the Bible, which she had been trying to read in the pauses of her agony, remained clasped in her hands.

Hannah Lee had been a servant for more than six months, and it was not to be thought that she was not beloved in her master's family. Soon after she had left the house, her master's son, a youth of about eighteen years, who had been among the hills looking after the sheep, came home, and was disappointed to find that he had lost an opportunity of accompanying Hannah part of the way to her father's cottage. But the hour of eight had gone by, and not even the company of young William Grieve could induce the kind-hearted daughter to delay setting out on her journey a few minutes beyond the time promised to her parents. "I do not like the night," said William—"there will be a fresh fall of snow soon, or the witch of Glen-Scrae is a liar, for a snow-cloud is hanging o'er the Birch-tree-linn, and it may be down to the Black-moss as soon as Hannah Lee." So he called his two sheep-dogs that had taken their place under the long table before the window, and set out, half in joy, half in fear, to overtake Hannah, and see her safely across the Black-moss.

The snow began to drift so fast, that before he had reached the head of the glen, there was nothing to be seen but a little bit of the wooden rail of the bridge across the Sauch-burn. William Grieve was the most active shepherd in a large pastoral parish; he had often passed the night among the wintry hills for the sake of a few sheep, and all the snow that ever fell from heaven would not have made him turn back when Hannah Lee was before him, and, as his terrified heart told him, in imminent danger of being lost. As he advanced, he felt that it was no longer a walk of love or friendship, for which he had been glad of an excuse. Death stared him in the face, and his young soul, now beginning to feel all the passions of youth, was filled with frenzy. He had seen Hannah every day—at the fireside—at work—in the kirk—on holidays—at prayers—bringing supper to his aged parents—smiling and singing about the house from morning till night. She had often brought his own meal to him among the hills—and he now found that though he had never talked to her about love, except smilingly and playfully, that he loved her beyond father or mother, or his own soul. "I will save thee, Hannah," he cried, with a loud sob, "or lie down beside thee in the snow—and we will die together in our youth." A wild whistling wind went by him, and the snow-flakes whirled so fiercely round his head, that he staggered on for a while in utter blindness. He knew the path that Hannah must have taken, and went forwards shouting aloud, and stopping every twenty yards to listen for a voice. He sent his well-trained dogs over the snow in all directions—repeating to them her name, "Hannah Lee," that the dumb animals might, in their sagacity, know for whom they were searching; and, as they looked up in his face, and set off to scour the moor, he almost believed that they knew his meaning (and it is probable they did), and were eager to find in her bewilderment the

kind maiden by whose hand they had so often been fed. Often went they off into the darkness, and as often returned, but their looks showed that every quest had been in vain. Meanwhile the snow was of a fearful depth, and falling without intermission or diminution. Had the young shepherd been thus alone, walking across the moor on his ordinary business, it is probable that he might have been alarmed for his own safety; nay, that, in spite of all his strength and agility, he might have sunk beneath the inclemency of the night, and perished. But now the passion of his soul carried him with supernatural strength along, and extricated him from wreath and pitfall. Still there was no trace of poor Hannah Lee; and one of his dogs at last came close to his feet, worn out entirely, and afraid to leave its master, while the other was mute, and, as the shepherd thought, probably unable to force its way out of some hollow, or through some floundering drift.

Then he all at once knew that Hannah Lee was dead—and dashed himself down in the snow in a fit of passion. It was the first time that the youth had ever been sorely tried—all his hidden and unconscious love for the fair lost girl had flowed up from the bottom of his heart—and at once the sole object which had blessed his life and made him the happiest of the happy, was taken away and cruelly destroyed—so that, sullen, wrathful, baffled, and despairing, there he lay cursing his existence, and in too great agony to think of prayer. "God," he then thought, "has forsaken me, and why should he think on me, when he suffers one so good and beautiful as Hannah to be frozen to death?" God thought both of him and Hannah; and through His infinite mercy forgave the sinner in his wild turbulence of passion. William Grieve had never gone to bed without joining in prayer, and he revered the Sabbath-day and kept it holy. Much is forgiven to the human heart by Him who so fearfully framed it; and God is not slow to pardon the love which one human being bears to another, in his frailty—even though that love forget or arraign His own unsleeping providence. His voice has told us to love one another—and William loved Hannah in simplicity, innocence, and truth. That she should perish was a thought so dreadful, that, in its agony, God seemed a ruthless being—"Blow—blow—blow—and drift us up for ever—we cannot be far asunder—Oh, Hannah—Hannah, think ye not that the fearful God has forsaken us!"

As the boy groaned these words passionately through his quivering lips, there was a sudden lowness in the air, and he heard the barking of his absent dog, while the one at his feet hurried off in the direction of the sound, and soon loudly joined the cry. It was not a bark of surprise—or anger—or fear—but of recognition and love. William sprang up from his bed in the snow, and, with his heart knocking at his bosom even to sickness, he rushed headlong through the drifts with a giant's strength, and fell down, half dead with joy and terror, beside the body of Hannah Lee.

But he soon recovered from that fit, and, lifting the cold corpse in his arms, he kissed her lips, and her cheeks, and her forehead, and

her closed eyes, till, as he kept gazing on her face in utter despair, her head fell back on his shoulder, and a long deep sigh came from her inmost bosom. "She is yet alive, thank God!"—and, as that expression left his lips for the first time that night, he felt a pang of remorse: "I said, O God, that thou hadst forsaken us—I am not worthy to be saved; but let not this maiden perish, for the sake of her parents, who have no other child." The distracted youth prayed to God with the same earnestness as if he had been beseeching a fellow-creature, in whose hand was the power of life and of death. The presence of the Great Being was felt by him in the dark and howling wild, and strength was imparted to him as to a deliverer. He bore along the fair child in his arms, even as if she had been a lamb. The snow-drift blew not—the wind fell dead—a sort of glimmer, like that of an upbreaking and disparting storm, gathered about him—his dogs barked, and jumped, and burrowed joyfully in the snow—and the youth, strong in sudden hope, exclaimed, "With the blessing of God, who has not deserted us in our sore distress, will I carry thee, Hannah, in my arms, and lay thee down alive in the house of thy father." At this moment there were no stars in heaven, but she opened her dim blue eyes upon him in whose bosom she was unconsciously lying, and said, as in a dream, "Send the ribbon that ties up my hair, as a keepsake to William Grieve." "She thinks that she is on her deathbed, and forgets not the son of her master. It is the voice of God that tells me she will not now die, and that, under His grace, I shall be her deliverer."

The short-lived rage of the storm was soon over, and William could attend to the beloved being on his bosom. The warmth of his heart seemed to infuse life into hers; and, as he gently placed her feet on the snow, till he muffled her up in his plaid, as well as in her own, she made an effort to stand, and, with extreme perplexity and bewilderment, faintly inquired where she was, and what fearful misfortune had befallen them? She was, however, too weak to walk; and, as her young master carried her along, she murmured, "O William! what if my father be in the moor?—For if you, who need care so little about me, have come hither, as I suppose to save my life, you may be sure that my father sat not within doors during the storm." As she spoke it was calm below, but the wind was still alive in the upper air, and cloud, rack, mist, and sleet, were all driving about in the sky. Out shone for a moment the pallid and ghostly moon, through a rent in the gloom, and by that uncertain light came staggering forward the figure of a man, "Father—father!" cried Hannah—and his grey hairs were already on her cheek. The barking of the dogs, and the shouting of the young shepherd had struck his ear, as the sleep of death was stealing over him, and, with the last effort of benumbed nature, he had roused himself from that fatal torpor, and pressed through the snow-wreath that had separated him from his child. As yet they knew not of the danger each had endured—but each judged of the other's sufferings from their own, and father and daughter regarded one another as creatures rescued, and hardly yet rescued, from death.

But a few minutes ago, and the three human beings who loved each other so well, and now feared not to cross the moor in safety, were, as they thought, on their deathbeds. Deliverance now shone upon them all like a gentle fire, dispelling that pleasant but deadly drowsiness; and the old man was soon able to assist William Grieve in leading Hannah along through the snow. Her colour and her warmth returned, and her lover—for so might he well now be called—felt her heart gently beating against his side. Filled as that heart was with gratitude to God, joy in her deliverance, love to her father, and purest affection for her master's son, never before had the innocent maiden known what was happiness—and never more was she to forget it. The night was now almost calm, and fast returning to its former beauty—when the party saw the first twinkle of the fire through the low window of the Cottage of the Moor. They soon were at the garden gate—and, to relieve the heart of the wife and mother within, they talked loudly and cheerfully—naming each other familiarly, and laughing between, like persons who had known neither danger nor distress.

No voice answered from within—no footstep came to the door, which stood open as when the father had left it in his fear, and now he thought with affright that his wife, feeble as she was, had been unable to support the loneliness, and had followed him out into the night, never to be brought home alive. As they bore Hannah into the house, this fear gave way to worse, for there upon the hard clay floor lay the mother upon her face, as if murdered by some savage blow. She was in the same deadly swoon into which she had fallen on her husband's departure three hours before. The old man raised her up, and her pulse was still—so was her heart—her face pale and sunken—and her body cold as ice. "I have recovered a daughter," said the old man, "but I have lost a wife;" and he carried her, with a groan, to the bed, on which he laid her lifeless body. The sight was too much for Hannah, worn out as she was, and who had hitherto been able to support herself in the delightful expectation of gladdening her mother's heart by her safe arrival. She, too, now swooned away, and, as she was placed on the bed beside her mother, it seemed, indeed, that death, disappointed of his prey on the wild moor, had seized it in the cottage, and by the fireside. The husband knelt down by the bedside, and held his wife's icy hand in his, while William Grieve, appalled and awe-stricken, hung over his Hannah, and inwardly implored God that the night's wild adventure might not have so ghastly an end. But Hannah's young heart soon began once more to beat—and, soon as she came to her recollection, she rose up with a face whiter than ashes and free from all smiles, as if none had ever played there, and joined her father and young master in their efforts to restore her mother to life.

It was the mercy of God that had struck her down to the earth, insensible to the shrieking winds, and the fears that would otherwise have killed her. Three hours of that wild storm had passed over her head, and she heard nothing more than if she had been asleep in a breathless night of the summer dew. Not even a dream

had touched her brain, and when she opened her eyes, which, as she thought, had been but a moment shut, she had scarcely time to recall to her recollection the image of her husband rushing out into the storm, and of a daughter therein lost, till she beheld that very husband kneeling tenderly by her bedside, and that very daughter smoothing the pillow on which her aching temples reclined. But she knew from the white steadfast countenances before her that there had been tribulation and deliverance, and she looked on the beloved beings ministering by her bed, as more fearfully dear to her from the unimagined danger from which she felt assured they had been rescued by the arm of the Almighty.

There is little need to speak of returning recollection, and returning strength. They had all now power to weep, and power to pray. The Bible had been lying in its place ready for worship, and the father read aloud that chapter in which is narrated our Saviour's act of miraculous power by which he saved Peter from the sea. Soon as the solemn thoughts awakened by that act of mercy, so similar to that which had rescued themselves from death, had subsided, and they had all risen up from prayer, they gathered themselves in gratitude round the little table which had stood so many hours spread; and exhausted nature was strengthened and restored by a frugal and simple meal, partaken of in silent thankfulness. The whole story of the night was then calmly recited; and when the mother heard how the stripling had followed her sweet Hannah into the storm, and borne her in his arms through a hundred drifted heaps—and then looked upon her in her pride, so young, so innocent, and so beautiful, she knew, that were the child indeed to become an orphan, there was one who, if there was either trust in nature or truth in religion, would guard and cherish her all the days of her life.

It was not nine o'clock when the storm came down from Glen-Scrae upon the Black-moss, and now in a pause of silence the clock struck twelve. Within these three hours William and Hannah had led a life of trouble and of joy, that had enlarged and kindled their hearts within them—and they felt that henceforth they were to live wholly for each other's sakes. His love was the proud and exulting love of a deliverer, who, under Providence, had saved from the frost and the snow, the innocence and the beauty of which his young passionate heart had been so desperately enamoured; and he now thought of his own Hannah Lee evermore moving about in his father's house, not as a servant, but as a daughter—and when some few happy years had gone by, his own most beautiful and most loving wife. The innocent maiden still called him her young master, but was not ashamed of the holy affection which she now knew that she had long felt for the fearless youth on whose bosom she had thought herself dying in that cold and miserable moor. Her heart leapt within her when she heard her parents bless him by his name—and when he took her hand into his before them, and vowed before that Power who had that night saved them from the snow, that Hannah Lee should ere long be his wedded wife—she wept and sobbed

as if her heart would break in a fit of strange and insupportable happiness.

The young shepherd rose to bid them farewell—"My father will think I am lost," said he, with a grave smile, "and my Hannah's mother knows what it is to fear for a child." So nothing was said to detain him, and the family went with him to the door. The skies smiled as serenely as if a storm had never swept before the stars—the moon was sinking from her meridian, but in cloudless splendour—and the hollow of the hills was hushed as that of heaven. Danger there was none over the placid night-scene—the happy youth soon crossed the Black-moss, now perfectly still—and, perhaps, just as he was passing with a shudder of gratitude, the very spot where his sweet Hannah Lee had so nearly perished, she was lying down to sleep in her innocence, or dreaming of one now dearer to her than all on earth but her parents.

THE ELDER'S DEATHBED.

It was on a fierce and howling winter day that I was crossing the dreary moor of Auchindown, on my way to the Manse of that parish—a solitary pedestrian. The snow, which had been incessantly falling for a week past, was drifted into beautiful but dangerous wreaths, far and wide, over the melancholy expanse—and the scene kept visibly shifting before me, as the strong wind that blew from every point of the compass struck the dazzling masses, and heaved them up and down in endless transformation. There was something inspiriting in the labour with which, in the buoyant strength of youth, I forced my way through the storm; and I could not but enjoy those gleamings of sunlight that ever and anon burst through some unexpected opening in the sky, and gave a character of cheerfulness, and even warmth, to the sides or summits of the stricken hills. Sometimes the wind stopped of a sudden, and then the air was as silent as the snow—not a murmur to be heard from spring or stream, now all frozen up over those high moorlands. As the momentary cessations of the sharp drift allowed my eyes to look onwards and around, I saw here and there up the little opening valleys, cottages just visible beneath the black stems of their snow-covered clumps of trees, or beside some small spot of green pasture kept open for the sheep. These intimations of life and happiness came delightfully to me in the midst of the desolation; and the barking of a dog, attending some shepherd in his quest on the hill, put fresh vigour into my limbs, telling me that, lonely as I seemed to be, I was surrounded by cheerful, though unseen company, and that I was not the only wanderer over the snows.

As I walked along, my mind was insensibly filled with a crowd of pleasant images of rural winter life, that helped me gladly onwards

over many miles of moor. I thought of the severe but cheerful labours of the barn—the mending of farm-gear by the fireside—the wheel turned by the foot of old age, less for gain than as a thrifty pastime—the skilful mother making "auld claes look amaist as weel's the new"—the ballad unconsciously listened to by the family all busy at their own tasks round the singing maiden—the old traditionary tale, told by some wayfarer hospitably housed till the storm should blow by—the unexpected visit of neighbours on need or friendship—or the footstep of lover undeterred by snow-drifts that have buried up his flocks;—but above all, I thought of those hours of religious worship that have not yet escaped from the domestic life of the Peasantry of Scotland—of the sound of psalms that the depth of snow cannot deaden to the ear of Him to whom they are chanted—and of that sublime Sabbath-keeping which, on days too tempestuous for the kirk, changes the cottage of the shepherd into the Temple of God.

With such glad and peaceful images in my heart, I travelled along that dreary moor, with the cutting wind in my face, and my feet sinking in the snow, or sliding on the hard blue ice beneath it—as cheerfully as I ever walked in the dewy warmth of a summer morning, through fields of fragrance and of flowers. And now I could discern, within half an hour's walk, before me, the spire of the church, close to which stood the Manse of my aged friend and benefactor. My heart burned within me as a sudden gleam of stormy sunlight tipped it with fire—and I felt, at that moment, an inexpressible sense of the sublimity of the character of that grey-headed Shepherd who had, for fifty years, abode in the wilderness, keeping together his own happy little flock.

As I was ascending a knoll, I saw before me on horseback an old man, with his long white hairs beaten against his face, who, nevertheless, advanced with a calm countenance against the hurricane. It was no other than my father, of whom I had been thinking—for my father had I called him for many years, and for many years my father had he truly been. My surprise at meeting him on such a moor—on such a day, was but momentary, for I knew that he was a Shepherd who cared not for the winter's wrath. As he stopped to take my hand kindly into his, and to give his blessing to his long-expected visitor, the wind fell calm—the whole face of the sky was softened, and brightness, like a smile, went over the blushing and crimson snow. The very elements seemed then to respect the hoary head of fourscore—and after our first greeting was over, when I looked around, in my affection, I felt how beautiful was winter.

"I am going," said he, "to visit a man at the point of death—a man whom you cannot have forgotten—whose head will be missed in the kirk next Sabbath by all my congregation—a devout man, who feared God all his days, and whom, on this awful trial, God will assuredly remember. I am going, my son, to the Hazel-glen."

I knew well in childhood that lonely farmhouse, so far off among the beautiful wild green hills—and it was not likely that I had forgotten the name of its possessor. For six years' Sabbaths I had

seen the ELDER in his accustomed place beneath the pulpit—and, with a sort of solemn fear had looked on his steadfast countenance during sermon, psalm, and prayer. On returning to the scenes of my infancy, I now met the Pastor going to pray by his deathbed; and, with the privilege which nature gives us to behold, even in their last extremity, the loving and the beloved, I turned to accompany him to the house of sorrow, resignation, and death.

And now, for the first time, I observed, walking close to the feet of his horse, a little boy of about ten years of age, who kept frequently looking up in the Pastor's face, with his blue eyes bathed in tears. A changeful expression of grief, hope, and despair, made almost pale cheeks that otherwise were blooming in health and beauty—and I recognised, in the small features and smooth forehead of childhood, a resemblance to the aged man whom we understood was now lying on his deathbed. "They had to send his grandson for me through the snow, mere child as he is," said the Minister to me, looking tenderly on the boy; "but love makes the young heart bold—and there is One who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."

I again looked on the fearless child with his rosy cheeks, blue eyes, and yellow hair, so unlike grief or sorrow, yet now sobbing aloud as his heart would break. "I do not fear but that my grandfather will yet recover, soon as the Minister has said one single prayer by his bedside. I had no hope, or little, as I was running by myself to the Manse over hill after hill, but I am full of hopes now that we are together; and oh! if God suffers my grandfather to recover, I will lie awake all the long winter nights blessing him for His mercy. I will rise up in the middle of the darkness, and pray to Him in the cold on my naked knees!" and here his voice was choked, while he kept his eyes fixed, as if for consolation and encouragement, on the solemn and pitying countenance of the kind-hearted pious Old Man.

We soon left the main road, and struck off through scenery that, covered as it was with the bewildering snow, I sometimes dimly and sometimes vividly remembered; our little guide keeping ever a short distance before us, and with a sagacity like that of instinct, showing us our course, of which no trace was visible, save occasionally his own little footprints as he had been hurrying to the Manse.

After crossing, for several miles, morass, and frozen rivulet, and drifted hollow, with here and there the top of a stone-wall peeping through the snow, or the more visible circle of a sheep-bught, we descended into the Hazel-glen, and saw before us the solitary house of the dying Elder.

A gleam of days gone by came suddenly over my soul. The last time that I had been in this glen was on a day of June, fifteen years before, a holiday, the birthday of the king. A troop of laughing schoolboys, headed by our benign pastor, we danced over the sunny braes, and startled the linnets from their nests among the yellow broom. Austere as seemed to us the ELDER'S Sabbath face when sitting in the kirk, we schoolboys knew that it had its weekday smiles—and we flew on the wings of joy to our annual festival of

curds and cream in the farmhouse of that little sylvan world. We rejoiced in the flowers and the leaves of that long, that interminable summer day; its memory was with our boyish hearts from June to June; and the sound of that sweet name, "Hazel-glen," often came upon us at our tasks, and brought too brightly into the school-room the pastoral imagery of that mirthful solitude.

As we now slowly approached the cottage through a deep snow-drift, which the distress within had prevented the household from removing, we saw peeping out from the door, brothers and sisters of our little guide, who quickly disappeared, and then their mother showed herself in their stead, expressing by her raised eyes and arms folded across her breast, how thankful she was to see at last the pastor, beloved in joy and trusted in trouble.

Soon as the venerable old man dismounted from his horse, our active little guide led it away into the humble stable, and we entered the cottage. Not a sound was heard but the ticking of the clock. The matron, who had silently welcomed us at the door, led us, with suppressed sighs and a face stained with weeping, into her father's sick-room, which even in that time of sore distress was as orderly as if health had blessed the house. I could not help remarking some old china ornaments on the chimneypiece, and in the window was an ever-blowing rose-tree, that almost touched the lowly roof, and brightened that end of the apartment with its blossoms. There was something tasteful in the simple furniture; and it seemed as if grief could not deprive the hand of that matron of its careful elegance. Sickness, almost hopeless sickness, lay there, surrounded with the same cheerful and beautiful objects which health had loved; and she, who had arranged and adorned the apartment in her happiness, still kept it from disorder and decay in her sorrow.

With a gentle hand she drew the curtain of the bed, and there, supported by pillows as white as the snow that lay without, reposed the Dying Elder. It was plain that the hand of God was upon him, and that his days on the earth were numbered.

He greeted his minister with a faint smile, and a slight inclination of the head—for his daughter had so raised him on the pillows, that he was almost sitting up in his bed. It was easy to see that he knew himself to be dying, and that his soul was prepared for the great change; yet, along with the solemn resignation of a Christian who had made his peace with God and his Saviour, there was blended on his white and sunken countenance an expression of habitual reverence for the minister of his faith; and I saw that he could not have died in peace without that comforter to pray by his deathbed.

A few words sufficed to tell who was the stranger—and the dying man, blessing me by name, held out to me his cold shrivelled hand, in token of recognition. I took my seat at a small distance from the bedside, and left a closer station for those who were more dear. The pastor sat down near his head; and, by the bed, leaning on it with gentle hands, stood that matron his daughter-in-law—a figure that would have graced and sainted a higher dwelling, and whose

native beauty was now more touching in its grief. But religion upheld her whom nature was bowing down; not now for the first time were the lessons taught by her father to be put into practice, for I saw that she was clothed in deep mourning—and she behaved like the daughter of a man whose life had not been only irreproachable, but lofty, with fear and hope fighting desperately but silently in the core of her pure and pious heart.

While we thus remained in silence, the beautiful boy, who, at the risk of his life, had brought the minister of religion to the bedside of his beloved grandfather, softly and cautiously opened the door, and with the hoar-frost yet unmelted on his bright glistering ringlets, walked up to the pillow, evidently no stranger there. He no longer sobbed—he no longer wept—for hope had risen strongly within his innocent heart, from the consciousness of love so fearlessly exerted, and from the presence of the holy man in whose prayers he trusted, as in the intercession of some superior and heavenly nature. There he stood, still as an image in his grandfather's eyes, that, in their dimness, fell upon him with delight. Yet, happy as was the trusting child, his heart was devoured by fear—and he looked as if one word might stir up the flood of tears that had subsided in his heart. As he crossed the dreary and dismal moors, he had thought of a corpse, a shroud, and a grave; he had been in terror, lest death should strike in his absence the old man, with whose grey hairs he had so often played; but now he *saw* him alive, and felt that death was not able to tear him away from the clasps, and links, and fetters of his grandchild's embracing love.

"If the storm do not abate," said the sick man, after a pause, "it will be hard for my friends to carry me over the drifts to the kirkyard." This sudden approach to the grave struck, as with a bar of ice, the heart of the loving boy; and, with a long deep sigh, he fell down with his face like ashes on the bed, while the old man's palsied right hand had just strength to lay itself upon his head. "Blessed be thou, my little Jamie, even for His own name's sake who died for us on the tree!" The mother, without terror, but with an averted face, lifted up her loving-hearted boy, now in a dead fainting-fit, and carried him into an adjoining room, where he soon revived. But that child and that old man were not to be separated. In vain was he asked to go to his brothers and sisters;—pale, breathless, and shivering, he took his place as before, with eyes fixed on his grandfather's face, but neither weeping nor uttering a word. Terror had frozen up the blood of his heart; but his were now the only dry eyes in the room; and the pastor himself wept, albeit the grief of fourscore is seldom vented in tears.

"God has been gracious to me, a sinner," said the dying man. "During thirty years that I have been an elder in your kirk, never have I missed sitting there one Sabbath. When the mother of my children was taken from me—it was on a Tuesday she died—and on Saturday she was buried. We stood together when my Alice was let down into the narrow house made for all living. On the Sabbath I joined in the public worship of God; she commanded me to do so

the night before she went away. I could not join in the Psalm that Sabbath, for her voice was not in the throng. Her grave was covered up, and grass and flowers grew there; so was my heart; but Thou, whom, through the blood of Christ, I hope to see this night in Paradise, knowest that, from that hour to this day, never have I forgotten Thee!"

The old man ceased speaking—and his grandchild, now able to endure the scene, for strong passion is its own support, glided softly to a little table, and bringing a cup in which a cordial had been mixed, held it in his small soft hands to his grandfather's lips. He drank, and then said, "Come closer to me, Jamie, and kiss me for thine own and thy father's sake;" and as the child fondly pressed his rosy lips on those of his grandfather, so white and withered, the tears fell over all the old man's face, and then trickled down on the golden head of the child at last sobbing in his bosom.

"Jamie, thy own father has forgotten thee in thy infancy, and me in my old age; but, Jamie, forget not thou thy father nor thy mother, for that thou knowest and feelest is the commandment of God."

The broken-hearted boy could give no reply. He had gradually stolen closer and closer unto the old loving man, and now was lying, worn out with sorrow, drenched and dissolved in tears, in his grandfather's bosom. His mother had sunk down on her knees, and hid her face with her hands. "Oh! if my husband knew but of this—he would never, never desert his dying father!" and I now knew that the Elder was praying on his deathbed for a disobedient and wicked son.

At this affecting time the minister took the Family Bible on his knees, and said, "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God, part of the fifteenth Psalm;" and he read, with a tremulous and broken voice, those beautiful verses:—

"Within thy tabernacle, Lord,
Who shall abide with thee?
And in thy high and holy hill
Who shall a dweller be?
The man that walketh uprightly,
And worketh righteousness,
And as he thinketh in his heart,
So doth he truth express."

The small congregation sang the noble hymn of the Psalmist to "Plaintive Martyrs, worthy of the name." The dying man himself, ever and anon, joined in the holy music—and when it feebly died away on his quivering lips, he continued still to follow the tune with the motion of his withered hand, and eyes devoutly and humbly lifted up to heaven. Nor was the sweet voice of his loving grandchild unheard; as if the strong fit of deadly passion had dissolved in the music, he sang with a sweet and silvery voice, that, to a passer-by, had seemed that of perfect happiness—a hymn sung in joy upon its knees by gladsome childhood before it flew out among the green hills, to quiet labour or gleesome play. As that sweetest voice came from the bosom of the old man, where the singer lay in affection,

and blended with his own so tremulous, never had I felt so affectingly brought before me the beginning and the end of life, the cradle and the grave.

Ere the psalm was yet over, the door was opened, and a tall fine-looking man entered, but with a lowering and dark countenance, seemingly in sorrow, in misery, and remorse. Agitated, confounded, and awe-struck by the melancholy and dirge-like music, he sat down on a chair—and looked with a ghastly face towards his father's death-bed. When the psalm ceased, the Elder said, with a solemn voice, "My son—thou art come in time to receive thy father's blessing. May the remembrance of what will happen in this room before the morning again shine over the Hazel-glen, win thee from the error of thy ways. Thou art here, to witness the mercy of thy God and thy Saviour, whom thou hast forgotten."

The Minister looked, if not with a stern, yet with an upbraiding countenance, on the young man, who had not recovered his speech, and said, "William! for three years past your shadow has not darkened the door of the House of God. They who fear not the thunder, may tremble at the still small voice—now is the hour for repentance—that your father's spirit may carry up to Heaven tidings of a contrite soul saved from the company of sinners!"

The young man, with much effort, advanced to the bedside, and at last found voice to say, "Father—I am not without the affections of nature—and I hurried home soon as I heard that the Minister had been seen riding towards our house. I hope that you will yet recover—and if I have ever made you unhappy, I ask your forgiveness—for though I may not think as you do on matters of religion, I have a human heart. Father! I may have been unkind, but I am not cruel. I ask your forgiveness."

"Come nearer to me, William; kneel down by the bedside, and let my hand find the head of my beloved son—for blindness is coming fast upon me. Thou wert my first-born, and thou art my only living son. All thy brothers and sisters are lying in the churchyard, beside her whose sweet face thine own, William, did once so much resemble. Long wert thou the joy, the pride of my soul, ay, too much the pride, for there was not in all the parish such a man, such a son, as my own William. If thy heart has since been changed, God may inspire it again with right thoughts. Could I die for thy sake—could I purchase thy salvation with the outpouring of thy father's blood—but this the son of God has done for thee, who hast denied him! I have sorely wept for thee—ay, William, when there was none near me—even as David wept for Absalom—for thee, my son, my son!"

A long deep groan was the only reply; but the whole body of the kneeling man was convulsed: and it was easy to see his sufferings, his contrition, his remorse, and his despair. The Pastor said, with a sterner voice, and austerer countenance than were natural to him, "Know you whose hand is now lying on your rebellious head? But what signifies the word father to him who has denied God, the

Father of us all?"—"Oh! press him not so hardly," said the weeping wife, coming forward from a dark corner of the room, where she had tried to conceal herself in grief, fear, and shame; "spare, oh! spare my husband—he has ever been kind to me;" and with that she knelt down beside him, with her long, soft, white arms mournfully and affectionately laid across his neck. "Go thou, likewise, my sweet little Jamie," said the Elder, "go even out of my bosom, and kneel down beside thy father and thy mother, so that I may bless you all at once, and with one yearning prayer." The child did as that solemn voice commanded, and knelt down somewhat timidly by his father's side; nor did that unhappy man decline encircling with his arm the child too much neglected, but still dear to him as his own blood, in spite of the deadening and debasing influence of infidelity.

"Put the Word of God into the hands of my son, and let him read aloud to his dying father the 25th, 26th, and 27th verses of the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to St John." The Pastor went up to the kneelers, and, with a voice of pity, condolence, and pardon, said, "There was a time when none, William, could read the Scriptures better than couldst thou—can it be that the son of my friend hath forgotten the lessons of his youth!" He had not forgotten them—there was no need for the repentant sinner to lift up his eyes from the bedside. The sacred stream of the Gospel had worn a channel in his heart, and the waters were again flowing. With a choked voice he said, "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."

"That is not an unbeliever's voice," said the dying man triumphantly; "nor, William, hast thou an unbeliever's heart. Say that thou believest in what thou hast now read, and thy father will die happy!"—"I do believe; and as thou forgivest me, so may I be forgiven by my Father who is in heaven."

The Elder seemed like a man suddenly inspired with a new life. His faded eyes kindled—his pale cheeks glowed—his palsied hands seemed to wax strong—and his voice was clear as that of manhood in its prime. "Into thy hands, O God, I commit my spirit!"—And so saying, he gently sank back on his pillow; and I thought I heard a sigh. There was then a long deep silence, and the father, and mother, and child rose from their knees. The eyes of us all were turned towards the white placid face of the Figure now stretched in everlasting rest; and, without lamentations, save the silent lamentations of the resigned soul, we stood around the DEATHBED OF THE ELDER.

THE ELDER'S FUNERAL.

How beautiful to the eye and to the heart rise up, in a pastoral region, the green silent hills from the dissolving snow-wreaths that yet linger at their feet! A few warm sunny days, and a few breezy and melting nights, have seemed to create the sweet season of Spring out of the Winter's bleakest desolation. We can scarcely believe that such brightness of verdure could have been shrouded in the snow, blending itself, as it now does, so vividly, with the deep blue of heaven. With the revival of nature our own souls feel restored. Happiness becomes milder—meeker—and richer in pensive thought; while sorrow catches a faint tinge of joy, and reposes itself on the quietness of earth's opening breast. Then is youth rejoicing—manhood sedate—and old age resigned. The child shakes his golden curls in his glee—he of riper life hails the coming year with temperate exultation, and the eye that has been touched with dimness, in the general spirit of delight forgets or fears not the shadows of the grave.

On such a vernal day as this did we, who had visited the Elder on his deathbed, walk together to his house in the Hazel-glen, to accompany his body to the place of burial. On the night he died it seemed to be the dead of Winter. On the day he was buried it seemed to be the birth of Spring. The old Pastor and I were alone for a while as we pursued our path up the glen, by the banks of the little burn. It had cleared itself off from the melted snow, and ran so pellucid a race, that every stone and pebble was visible in its yellow channel. The willows, the alders, and the birches, the fairest and the earliest of our native hill trees, seemed almost tinged with a verdant light as if they were budding; and beneath them, here and there peeped out, as in the pleasure of new existence, the primrose lonely, or in little families and flocks. The bee had not yet ventured to leave his cell, yet the flowers reminded one of his murmur. A few insects were dancing in the air, and here and there some little moorland bird, touched at the heart with the warm sunny change, was piping his love-sweet song among the braes. It was just such a day as grave a meditative man, like him we were about to inter, would have chosen to walk over his farm in religious contentment with his lot. That was the thought that entered the Pastor's heart, as we paused to enjoy one brighter gleam of the sun in a little meadow-field of peculiar beauty. "This is the last day of the week—and on that day often did the Elder walk through this little happy kingdom of his own, with some of his grandchildren beside and around him, and often his Bible in his hand. It is, you feel, a solitary place—all the vale is one seclusion—and often have its quiet bounds been a place of undisturbed meditation and prayer."

We now come in sight of the cottage, and beyond it the termination of the Glen. There the high hills came sloping gently down; and a little waterfall, in the distance, gave animation to a scene of perfect repose. We were now joined by various small parties com-

ing to the funeral through openings among the hills; all sedate, but none sad, and every greeting was that of kindness and peace. The Elder had died full of years; and there was no need why any out of his household should weep. A long life of piety had been beautifully closed; and, therefore, we were all going to commit the body to the earth, assured, as far as human beings may be so assured, that the soul was in Heaven. As the party increased on our approach to the house, there was even cheerfulness among us. We spoke of the early and bright promise of spring—of the sorrows and the joys of other families—of marriages and births—of the new schoolmaster—of to-morrow's Sabbath. There was no topic of which, on any common occasion, it might have been fitting to speak, that did not now perhaps occupy, for a few moments, some one or other of the group, till we found ourselves ascending the greensward before the cottage, and stood below the bare branches of the sycamores. Then we were all silent, and, after a short pause, reverently entered into the house of death.

At the door the son received us with a calm, humble, and untroubled face; and in his manner towards the old Minister, there was something that could not be misunderstood, expressing penitence, gratitude, and resignation. We all sat down in the large kitchen; and the son decently received each person at the door, and showed him to his place. There were some old grey heads—more becoming grey—and many bright in manhood and youth. But the same solemn hush was over them all; and they sat all bound together in one uniting and assimilating spirit of devotion and faith. Wine and bread was to be sent round—but the son looked to the old Minister, who rose, lifted up his withered hand, and began a blessing and a prayer.

There was so much composure and stillness in the old man's attitude, and something so affecting in his voice, tremulous and broken, not in grief but age, that no sooner had he begun to pray, than every heart and every breath at once were hushed. All stood motionless, nor could one eye abstain from that placid and patriarchal countenance, with its closed eyes, and long silvery hair. There was nothing sad in his words, but they were all humble and solemn, and at times even joyful in the kindling spirit of piety and faith. He spoke of the dead man's goodness as imperfect in the eyes of his Great Judge, but such as, we were taught, might lead, through intercession, to the kingdom of heaven. Might the blessing of God, he prayed, which had so long rested on the head now coffined, not forsake that of him who was now to be the father of this house. There was more—more joy, we were told, in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance. Fervently, too, and tenderly, did the old man pray for her, in her silent chamber, who had lost so kind a parent, and for all the little children round her knees. Nor did he end his prayer without some allusion to his own grey hairs, and to the approaching day on which many then present would attend his burial.

Just as he ceased to speak, one solitary stifled sob was heard, and

all eyes turned kindly round to a little boy who was standing by the side of the Elder's son. Restored once more to his own father's love, his heart had been insensibly filled with peace since the old man's death. The returning tenderness of the living came in place of that of the dead, and the child yearned towards his father now with a stronger affection, relieved at last from all his fear. He had been suffered to sit an hour each day beside the bed on which his grandfather lay shrouded, and he had got reconciled to the cold, but silent and happy looks of death. His mother and his Bible told him to obey God without repining in all things; and the child did so with perfect simplicity. One sob had found its way at the close of that pathetic prayer; but the tears that bathed his glistening cheeks were far different from those that, on the day and night of his grandfather's decease, had burst from the agony of a breaking heart. The old Minister laid his hand silently upon his golden head—there was a momentary murmur of kindness and pity over the room—the child was pacified—and again all was repose and peace.

A sober voice said that all was ready, and the son and the minister led the way reverently out into the open air. The bier stood before the door, and was lifted slowly up with its sable pall. Silently each mourner took his place. The sun was shining pleasantly, and a gentle breeze passing through the sycamore, shook down the glittering rain-drops upon the funeral velvet. The small procession, with an instinctive spirit, began to move along; and as I cast up my eyes to take a farewell look of that beautiful dwelling, now finally left by him who so long had blessed it, I saw at the half-open lattice of the little bedroom window above, the pale weeping face of that stainless matron, who was taking her last passionate farewell of the mortal remains of her father, now slowly receding from her to the quiet field of graves.

We proceeded along the edges of the hills, and along the meadow fields, crossed the old wooden bridge over the burn, now widening in its course to the plain, and in an hour of pensive silence, or pleasant talk, we found ourselves entering, in a closer body, the little gateway of the churchyard. To the tolling of the bell we moved across the green mounds, and arranged ourselves, according to the plan and order which our feelings suggested, around the bier and its natural supporters. There was no delay. In a few minutes the Elder was laid among the mould of his forefathers, in their long-ago chosen spot of rest. One by one the people dropped away, and none were left by the new-made grave but the son and his little boy, the Pastor and myself. As yet nothing was said, and in that pause I looked around me, over the sweet burial-ground.

Each tombstone and grave over which I had often walked in boyhood, arose in my memory, as I looked steadfastly upon their long-forgotten inscriptions; and many had since then been erected. The whole character of the place was still simple and unostentatious, but from the abodes of the dead, I could see that there had been an improvement in the condition of the living. There was a taste visible

in their decorations, not without much of native feeling, and occasionally something even of native grace. If there was any other inscription than the name and age of the poor inhabitants below, it was, in general, some short text of Scripture; for it is most pleasant and soothing to the pious mind, when bereaved of friends, to commemorate them on earth by some touching expression taken from that Book which reveals to them a life in Heaven.

There is a sort of gradation, a scale of forgetfulness, in a country churchyard, where the processes of nature are suffered to go on over the green place of burial, that is extremely affecting in the contemplation. The soul goes from the grave just covered up, to that which seems scarcely joined together, on and on to those folded and bound by the undisturbed verdure of many, many unremembered years. It then glides at last into nooks and corners where the ground seems perfectly calm and waveless, utter oblivion having smoothed the earth over the long mouldered bones. Tombstones on which the inscriptions are hidden in green obliteration, or that are mouldering, or falling to a side, are close to others which last week were brushed by the chisel:—constant renovation and constant decay—vain attempts to adhere to memory—and oblivion, now baffled and now triumphant, smiling among all the memorials of human affection, as they keep continually crumbling away into the world of undistinguishable dust and ashes.

The churchyard, to the inhabitants of a rural parish, is the place to which, as they grow older, all their thoughts and feelings turn. The young take a look of it every Sabbath-day, not always perhaps a careless look, but carry away from it, unconsciously, many salutary impressions. What is more pleasant than the meeting of a rural congregation in the churchyard before the minister appears? What is there to shudder at in lying down, sooner or later, in such a peaceful and sacred place, to be spoken of frequently on Sabbath among the groups of which we used to be one, and our low burial-spot to be visited, at such times, as long as there remains on earth any one to whom our face was dear? To those who mix in the strife and dangers of the world, the place is felt to be uncertain wherein they may finally lie at rest. The soldier—the sailor—the traveller, can only see some dim grave dug for him, when he dies, in some place obscure—nameless—and unfixed to imagination. All he feels is, that his burial will be—on earth—or in the sea. But the peaceful dwellers who cultivate their paternal acres, or tilling at least the same small spot of soil, shift only from a cottage on the hill-side to one on the plain, still within the bounds of one quiet parish—they look to lay their bones at last in the burial-place of the kirk in which they were baptised, and with them it almost literally is but a step from the cradle to the grave.

Such were the thoughts that calmly followed each other in my reverie, as I stood beside the Elder's grave, and the trodden grass was again lifting up its blades from the pressure of many feet, now all—but a few—departed. What a simple burial had it been! Dust was consigned to dust—no more. Bare, naked, simple, and austere,

is in Scotland the service of the grave. It is left to the soul itself to consecrate, by its passion, the mould over which tears, but no words, are poured. Surely there is a beauty in this; for the heart is left unto its own sorrow—according as it is a friend—a brother—a parent—or a child, that is covered up from our eyes. Yet call not other rites, however different from this, less beautiful or pathetic. For willingly does the soul connect its grief with any consecrated ritual of the dead. Sound or silence—music—hymns—psalms—sable garments, or raiment white as snow—all become holy symbols of the soul's affection; nor is it for any man to say which is the most natural, which is the best, of the thousand shows and expressions, and testimonies of sorrow, resignation, and love, by which mortal beings would seek to express their souls when one of their brethren has returned to his parent dust.

My mind was recalled from all these sad, yet not unpleasant fancies, by a deep groan, and I beheld the Elder's son fling himself down upon the grave and kiss it passionately, imploring pardon from God. "I distressed my father's heart in his old age—I repented—and received thy forgiveness even on thy deathbed! But how may I be assured that God will forgive me for having so sinned against my old grey-headed father, when his limbs were weak and his eyesight dim!" The old Minister stood at the head of the grave without speaking a word, with his solemn and pitiful eyes fixed upon the prostrate and contrite man. His sin had been great, and tears that till now had, on this day at least, been compressed within his heart by the presence of so many of his friends, now poured down upon the sod as if they would have found their way to the very body of his father. Neither of us offered to lift him up, for we felt awed by the rueful passion of his love, his remorse, and his penitence; and nature, we felt, ought to have her way. "Fear not, my son," at length said the old man, in a gentle voice—"fear not, my son, but that you are already forgiven. Dost thou not feel pardon within thy contrite spirit?" He rose up from his knees with a faint smile, while the Minister, with his white head yet uncovered, held his hands over him as in benediction; and that beautiful and loving child, who had been standing in a fit of weeping terror at his father's agony, now came up to him and kissed his cheek—holding in his little hand a few faded primroses which he had unconsciously gathered together as they lay on the turf of his grandfather's grave.

THE TWINS.

The Kirk of Auchindown stands, with its burial-ground, on a little green hill, surrounded by an irregular and straggling village, or rather about a hundred hamlets clustering round it, with their fields and gardens. A few of these gardens come close up to the church-

yard wall, and in spring time many of the fruit-trees hang rich and beautiful over the adjacent graves. The voices and the laughter of the children at play on the green before the parish school, or their composed murmur when at their various lessons together in the room, may be distinctly heard all over the burial-ground—so may the song of the maidens going to the well ;—while all around the singing of birds is thick and hurried ; and a small rivulet, as if brought there to be an emblem of passing time, glides away beneath the mossy wall, murmuring continually a dream-like tune around the dwellings of the dead.

In the quiet of the evening, after the Elder's funeral, my venerable friend and father took me with him into the churchyard. We walked to the eastern corner, where, as we approached, I saw a monument standing almost by itself, and, even at that distance, appearing to be of a somewhat different character from any other over all the burial-ground. And now we stood close to, and before it.

It was a low monument, of the purest white marble, simple, but perfectly elegant and graceful withal, and upon its unadorned slab lay the sculptured images of two children asleep in each other's arms. All around it was a small piece of greenest ground, without the protection of any rail, but obviously belonging to the monument. It shone, without offending them, among the simpler or ruder burial-beds round about it, and, although the costliness of the materials, the affecting beauty of the design, and the delicacy of its execution, all showed that there slept the offspring neither of the poor nor low in life, yet so meekly and sadly did it lift up its unstained little walls, and so well did its unusual elegance meet and blend with the character of the common tombs, that no heart could see it without sympathy, and without owning that it was a pathetic ornament of a place filled with the ruder memorials of the very humblest dead.

"There lie two of the sweetest children," said the old man, "that ever delighted a mother's soul—two English boys—scions of a noble stem. They were of a decayed family of high lineage ; and, had they died in their own country a hundred years ago, they would have been let down into a vault with all the pomp of religion. Methinks, fair flowers, they are now sleeping as meetly here.

"Six years ago, I was an old man, and wished to have silence and stillness in my house, that my communion with Him before whom I expected every day to be called might be undisturbed. Accordingly, my Manse, that used to ring with boyish glee, was now quiet ; when a lady, elegant, graceful, beautiful, young, and a widow, came to my dwelling, and her soft, sweet, silver voice told me that she was from England. She was the relict of an officer slain in war, and, having heard a dear friend of her husband's, who had lived in my house, speak of his happy and innocent time here, she earnestly requested me to receive beneath my roof her two sons. She herself lived with the bed-ridden mother of her dead husband ; and, anxious for the growing minds of her boys, she sought to commit them for a short time to my care. They and their mother soon won an old

man's heart, and I could say nothing in opposition to her request, but that I was upwards of threescore and ten years. But I am living still—and that is their monument."

We sat down, at these words, on the sloping headstone of a grave just opposite to this little beautiful structure, and without entreaty, and as if to bring back upon his heart the delight of old tender remembrances, the venerable man continued fervently thus to speak :—

"The lady left them with me in the Manse—surely the two most beautiful and engaging creatures that ever died in youth. They were twins. Like were they unto each other, as two bright-plumaged doves of one colour, or two flowers with the same blossom and the same leaves. They were dressed alike, and whatever they wore, in that did they seem more especially beautiful. The hair was the same, a bright auburn—their voices were as one—so that the Twins were inseparable in my love, whether I beheld them, or my dim eyes were closed. From the first hour they were left alone with me, and without their mother, in the Manse, did I begin to love them, nor were they slow in returning an old man's affection. They stole up to my side, and submitted their smooth, glossy, leaning heads to my withered and trembling hand ; nor for a while could I tell, as the sweet beings came gliding gladsomely near me, which was Edward and which was Henry ; and often did they, in loving playfulness, try to deceive my loving heart. But they could not defraud each other of my tenderness ; for whatever the one received, that was ready to be bestowed upon the other. To love the one more than the other was impossible.

"Sweet creatures! it was not long before I learned to distinguish them. That which seemed to me, at first, so perfectly the same, soon unfolded itself out into many delightful varieties, and then I wondered how I ever could have mistaken them for one another. Different shadows played upon their hair ; that of the one being silky and smooth, and of the other slightly curled at the edges, and clustering thickly when he flung his locks back in playfulness or joy. His eyes, though of a hazel hue like that of his brother, were considerably lighter, and a smile seemed native there ; while those of the other seemed almost dark, and fitter for the mist of tears. Dimples marked the cheeks of the one, but those of the other were paler and smooth. Their voices, too, when I listened to them and knew their character, had a faint fluctuating difference of inflection and tone—like the same instrument blown upon with a somewhat stronger or weaker breath. Their very laugh grew to be different unto my ear—that of the one freer and more frequent, that of the other mild in its utmost glee. And they had not been many days in the Manse, before I knew in a moment, dim as my eyes had long been, the soft, timid, stealing step of Edward, from the dancing and fearless motion of Henry Howard."

Here the old man paused, not as it seemed from any fatigue in speaking so long, but as if to indulge more profoundly in his remembrance of the children whom he had so tenderly loved. He fixed his dim eyes on their sculptured images with as fond an expression as if

they had been alive and had lain down there to sleep; and when, without looking on me, whom he felt to have been listening with quiet attention, he again began to speak, it was partly to tell me the tale of these fair sleepers, and partly to give vent to his loving grief.

"All strangers, even many who thought they knew them well, were pleasantly perplexed with the faces and figures of the bright English Twins. The poor beggars, as they went their rounds, blessed them, without knowing whether it was Edward or Henry that had bestowed his alms. The mother of the cottage children with whom they played confused their images in her loving heart, as she named them in her prayers. When only one was present, it gave a start of strange delight to them who did not know the Twins, to see another creature so beautifully the same come gliding in upon them, and join his brother in a share of their suddenly bestowed affection.

"They soon came to love, with all their hearts, the place wherein they had their new habitation. Not even in their own merry England had their young eyes ever seen brighter green fields—trees more umbrageous—or, perhaps, even rural gardens more flowery and blossoming than those of this Scottish village. They had lived, indeed, mostly in a town; and in the midst of the freshness and balminess of the country they became happier and more gleesome—it was said by many even more beautiful. The affectionate creatures did not forget their mother. Alternately did they write to her every week—and every week did one or other receive from her a letter, in which the sweetest maternal feelings were traced in small delicate lines, that bespoke the hand of an accomplished lady. Their education had not been neglected; and they learned everything they were taught with a surprising quickness and docility—alike amiable and intelligent. Morning and evening, too, did they kneel down with clasped hands—these lovely Twins—even at my feet, and resting on my knees; and melodiously did they murmur together the hymns which their mother had taught them, and passages selected from the Scriptures—many of which are in the affecting, beautiful, and sublime ritual of the English Church. And always, the last thing they did, before going to sleep in each other's arms, was to look at their mother's picture, and to kiss it with fond kisses, and many an endearing name."

Just then, two birds alighted softly on the white marble monument, and began to trim their plumes. They were doves from their nest in the belfry of the spire, from which a low, deep, plaintive murmuring was now heard to come, deepening the profound silence of the burial-ground. The two bright birds walked about for a few minutes round the images of the children, or stood quietly at their feet; and then, clapping their wings, flew up and disappeared. The incident, though at any other time common and uninteresting, had a strange effect upon my heart now, and seemed dimly emblematic of the innocence and beauty of the inhabitants of that tomb, and of the flight of their sinless souls to heaven.

"One evening in early Autumn (they had been with me from the middle of May), Edward, the elder, complained, on going to bed, of a

sore throat, and I proposed that his brother should sleep in another bed. I saw them myself, accordingly, in separate places of repose. But on going, about an hour afterwards, into their room, there I found them locked, as usual, in each other's arms—face to face—and their innocent breath mingling from lips that nearly touched. I could not find heart to separate them, nor could I have done so without awaking Edward. His cheeks were red and flushed, and his sleep broken and full of starts. Early in the morning I was at their bedside. Henry was lying apart from his brother, looking at him with a tearful face, and his little arm laid so as to touch his bosom. Edward was unable to rise—his throat was painful, his pulse high, and his heart sick. Before evening, he became slightly delirious, and his illness was evidently a fever of a dangerous and malignant kind. He was, I told you, a bold and gladsome child, when not at his tasks, dancing and singing almost every hour; but the fever quickly subdued his spirit, the shivering fits made him weep and wail, and rueful indeed was the change which a single night and day had brought forth.

His brother seemed to be afraid more than children usually are of sickness, which they are always slow to link with the thought of death. But he told me, weeping, that his eldest brother had died of a fever, and that his mother was always alarmed about that disease. "Did I think," asked he, with wild eyes, and a palpitating heart—"did I think that Edward was going to die?" I looked at the affectionate child, and, taking him to my bosom, I felt that his own blood was beating but too quickly, and that fatal had been that night's sleeping embrace in his brother's bosom. The fever had tainted his sweet veins also—and I had soon to lay him shivering on his bed. In another day he too was delirious—and too plainly chasing his brother into the grave.

"Never in the purest hours of their healthful happiness had their innocent natures seemed to me more beautiful than now in their delirium. As it increased, all vague fears of dying left their souls, and they kept talking as if to each other of everything here or in England that was pleasant and interesting. Now and then they murmured the names of persons of whom I had not formerly heard them speak—friends who had been kind to them before I had known of their existence, and servants in their mother's or father's household. Of their mother they spoke to themselves, though necessarily kept apart, almost in the very same words, expecting a visit from her at the Manse, and then putting out their little hands to embrace her. All their innocent plays were acted over and over again on the bed of death. They were looking into the nests of the little singing-birds, which they never injured, in the hedgerows and the woods. And the last intelligible words that I heard Edward utter were these,—'Let us go, brother, to the churchyard, and lie down on the daisies, among the little green mounds!'

"They both died within an hour of each other. I lifted up Henry, when I saw he too was dead, and laid him down beside his brother. There lay the Twins, and had their mother at that hour come into

the room, she would have been thankful to see that sight, for she would have thought that her children were in a calm and refreshing sleep!"

My eyes were fixed upon the sculptured images of the dead—lying side by side, with their faces up to heaven, their little hands folded as in prayer upon their bosoms, and their eyelids closed. The old man drew a sigh almost like a sob, and wept. They had been intrusted to his care—they had come smiling from another land—for one summer they were happy—and then disappeared, like the other fading flowers, from the earth. I wished that the old man would cease his touching narrative—both for his sake and my own. So I rose, and walked up quite close to the monument, inspecting the spirit of its design, and marking the finish of its execution. But he called me to him, and, requesting me to resume my seat beside him on the gravestone, he thus continued:—

"I had written to their mother in England that her children were in extreme danger, but it was not possible that she could arrive in time to see them die, nor even to see them buried. Decay was fast preying upon them, and the beauty of death was beginning to disappear. So we could not wait the arrival of their mother, and their grave was made. Even the old grey-headed sexton wept, for in this case of mortality there was something to break in upon the ordinary tenor of his thoughts, and to stir up in his heart feelings that he could not have known existed there. There was sadness indeed over all the parish for the fair English Twins, who had come to live in the Manse after all the other boys had left it, and who, as they were the last, so were they the loveliest of all my flock. The very sound or accent of their Southern voices, so pretty and engaging to our ears in the simplicity of childhood, had won many a heart, and touched, too, the imaginations of many with a new delight; and, therefore, on the morning when they were buried, it may be said there was here a fast-day of grief.

"The dead children were English—in England had all their ancestors been born; and I knew, from the little I had seen of the mother, that, though she had brought her mind to confide her children to the care of a Scottish minister in their tender infancy, she was attached truly and deeply to the ordinances of her own Church. I felt that it would be accordant with her feelings, and that afterwards she would have satisfaction in the thought, that they should be buried according to the form of the English funeral-service. I communicated this wish to an Episcopalian clergyman in the city, and he came to my house. He arranged the funeral, as far as possible in the circumstances, according to that service; and although, no doubt, there was a feeling of curiosity mingled in many minds with the tenderness and awe which that touching and solemn ceremonial awakened, yet it was witnessed, not only without any feelings of repugnance or scorn, but, I may in truth say, with a rational sympathy, and with all the devout emotions embodied in language so Scriptural and true to nature.

"The bier was carried slowly aloft upon men's shoulders, towards the churchyard gate, I myself walking at their little heads. Some

of the neighbouring gentry, my own domestics, a few neighbours, and some of the school children, formed the procession. The latter, walking before the coffin, continued singing a funeral psalm all the way till we reached the churchyard gate. It was a still gentle autumnal day, and now and then a withered leaf came rustling across the path of the weeping choristers. To us, to whom that dirge-like strain was new, all seemed like a pensive, and mournful, and holy dream.

"The clergyman met the bier at the gate, and preceded it into the kirk. It was then laid down; and, while all knelt, I keeping my place at the heads of the sweet boys—he read beautifully, affectingly, and solemnly, a portion of the funeral-service. The children had been beloved and admired while alive, as the English Twins, and so had they always been called; and that feeling of their having belonged, as it were, to another country, not only justified, but made pathetic to all now assembled upon their knees, the ritual employed by that Church to which they, and their parents, and all their ancestors had belonged. A sighing, and a sobbing too, was heard over the silence of my kirk, when the clergyman repeated these words, 'As soon as thou scatterest them, they are even as a sleep, and fade away suddenly like the grass.

"'In the morning it is green and groweth up: but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered.'"

While the old man was thus describing their burial, the clock in the steeple struck, and he paused a moment at the solemn sound. Soon as it had told the hour of advancing evening, he arose from the gravestone, as if his mind sought a relief from the weight of tenderness in a change of bodily position. We stood together facing the little monument, and his narrative was soon brought to a close.

"We were now all collected together round the grave. The silence of yesterday at the Elder's funeral, was it not felt by you to be agreeable to all our natural feelings? So were the words which were now spoken over these children. The whole ceremony was different, but it touched the very same feelings in our hearts. It lent an expression to what, in that other case, was willing to be silent. There was a sweet, a sad, and a mournful consistency in the ritual of death, from the moment we receded from the door of the Manse, accompanied by the music of that dirge sung by the clear tremulous voices of the young and innocent, till we entered the kirk with the coffin, to the sound of the priest's chanted verses from Job and St John, during the time when we knelt round the dead children in the house of God, also during our procession thence to the grave-side, still attended with chanting, or reciting, or responding voices; and, finally, at the moment of dropping of a piece of earth upon the coffin (it was from my own hand), while the priest said, 'We commit their bodies to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

"Next day their mother arrived at the Manse. She knew before she came that her children were dead and buried. It is true that

she wept; and at the first sight of their grave—for they both lay in one coffin—her grief was passionate and bitter. But that fit soon passed away. Her tears were tears of pity for them, but as for herself, she hoped that she was soon to see them in heaven. Her face pale, yet flushed—her eyes hollow, yet bright, and a general languor and lassitude over her whole frame, all told that she was in the first stage of a consumption. This she knew, and was happy. But other duties called her back to England for the short remainder of her life. She herself drew the design of that monument with her own hand, and left it with me when she went away. I soon heard of her death. Her husband lies buried near Granada, in Spain; she lies in the chancel of the Cathedral of Salisbury, in England; and there sleep her twins in the little burial-ground of Auchindown, a Scottish parish."

THE POOR SCHOLAR.

The vernal weather, that had come so early in the year as to induce a fear that it would not be lasting, seemed, contrary to that foreboding of change, to become every day more mild and genial; and the spirit of beauty, that had at first ventured out over the bosom of the earth with timid footsteps, was now blending itself more boldly with the deep verdure of the ground, and the life of the budding trees. Something in the air, and in the great wide blue bending arch of the unclouded sky, called upon the heart to come forth from the seclusion of parlour or study, and partake of the cheerfulness of nature.

We had made some short excursions together up the lonely glens, and over the moors, and also through the more thickly inhabited field-farms of his parish, and now the old Minister proposed that we should pay a visit to a solitary hut near the head of a dell, which, although not very remote from the Manse, we had not yet seen; and I was anxious that we should do so, as, from his conversation, I understood that we should see there a family—if so a widow and her one son could be called—that would repay us, by the interest we could not fail to feel in their character, for the time and toil spent on reaching their secluded and guarded dwelling.

"The poor widow woman," said the Minister, "who lives in the hut called Brachead, has as noble a soul as ever tenanted a human bosom. One earthly hope alone has she now—but I fear it never will be fulfilled. She is the widow of a common cotter, who lived and died in the hut which she and her son now inhabit. Her husband was a man of little education, but intelligent, even ingenious, simple, laborious, and pious. His duties lay all within a narrow circle, and his temptations, it may be said, were few. Such as they were, he discharged the one and withstood the other. Nor is there

any reason to think that, had they both been greater, he would have been found wanting. He was contented with meal and water all his days, and so fond of work, that he seemed to love the summer chiefly for the length of its labouring days. He had a slight genius for mechanics; and, during the long winter evenings, he made many articles of curious workmanship, the sale of which added a little to the earnings of his severer toil. The same love of industry excited him from morning to night; but he had also stronger, tenderer, and dearer motives; for if his wife and their one pretty boy should outlive him, he hoped that, though left poor, they would not be left in penury, but enabled to lead, without any additional hardships, the usual life, at least, of the widow and the orphans of honest hard-working men. Few thought much about Abraham Blane while he lived, except that he was an industrious and blameless man; but, on his death, it was felt that there had been something far more valuable in his character; and now I myself, who knew him well, was pleasingly surprised to know that he had left his widow and boy a small independence. Then the memory of his long summer days, and long winter nights, all ceaselessly employed in some kind of manual labour, dignified the lowly and steadfast virtue of the unpretending and conscientious man.

"The widow of this humble-hearted and simple-minded man, whom we shall this forenoon visit, you will remember, perhaps, although then neither she nor her husband were much known in the parish, as the wife of the basket-maker. Her father had been a clergyman—but his stipend was one of the smallest in Scotland, and he died in extreme poverty. This, his only daughter, who had many fine feelings and deep thoughts in her young innocent and simple heart, was forced to become a menial servant in a farm-house. There subduing her heart to her situation, she married that inoffensive and good man; and all her life has been—maid, wife, and widow—the humblest among the humble. But you shall soon have an opportunity of seeing what sense, what feeling, what knowledge, and what piety, may all live together, without their owner suspecting them, in the soul of the lonely widow of a Scottish cotter; for, except that she is pious, she thinks not that she possesses any other treasure; and even her piety she regards, like a true Christian, as a gift bestowed.

"But well worthy of esteem, and, to speak in the language of this world's fancies, of admiration, as you will think this poor solitary widow, perhaps you will think such feelings bestowed even more deservedly on her only son. He is now a boy only of sixteen years of age, but in my limited experience of life, never knew I such another. From his veriest infancy he showed a singular capacity for learning; at seven years of age he could read, write, and was even an arithmetician. He seized upon books with the same avidity with which children, in general, seize upon playthings. He soon caught glimmerings of the meaning even of other languages; and, before he was ten years old, there were in his mind clear dawnings of the scholar, and indications not to be doubted of genius and intellectual

power. His father was dead—but his mother, who was no common woman, however common her lot, saw with pure delight, and with strong maternal pride, that God had given her an extraordinary child to bless her solitary hut. She vowed to dedicate him to the ministry, and that all her husband had left should be spent upon him, to the last farthing, to qualify him to be a preacher of God's word. Such ambition, if sometimes misplaced, is almost always necessarily honourable. Here it was justified by the excelling talents of the boy—by his zeal for knowledge—which was like a fever in his blood—and by a childish piety, of which the simple, and eloquent, and beautiful expression has more than once made me shed tears. But let us leave the Manse, and walk to Braehead. The sunshine is precious at this early season; let us enjoy it while it smiles!"

We crossed a few fields—a few coppice-woods—an extensive sheep pasture, and then found ourselves on the edge of a moorland. Keeping the shelving heather ridge of hills above us, we gently descended into a narrow rushy glen, without anything that could be called a stream, but here and there crossed and intersected by various runlets. Soon all cultivation ceased, and no houses were to be seen. Had the glen been a long one, it would have seemed desolate, but on turning round a little green mount that ran almost across it, we saw at once an end to our walk, and one hut, with a peatstack close to it, and one or two elder, or, as we call them in Scotland, bourtrie-bushes, at the low gable-end. A little smoke seemed to tinge the air over the roof uncertainly—but except in that, there was nothing to tell that the hut was inhabited. A few sheep lying near it, and a single cow of the small hill breed, seemed to appertain to the hut, and a circular wall behind it apparently enclosed a garden. We sat down together on one of those large mossy stones that often lie among the smooth green pastoral hills, like the relics of some building utterly decayed—and my venerable friend, whose solemn voice was indeed pleasant in this quiet solitude, continued the simple history of the Poor Scholar.

"At school he soon outstripped all the other boys, but no desire of superiority over his companions seemed to actuate him—it was the pure native love of knowledge. Gentle as a lamb, but happy as a lark, the very wildest of them all loved Isaac Blane. He procured a Hebrew Bible and a Greek Testament, both of which he taught himself to read. It was more than affecting—it was sublime and awful, to see the solitary boy sitting by himself on the braes shedding tears over the mysteries of the Christian faith. His mother's heart burned within her towards her son; and if it was pride, you will allow that it was pride of a divine origin. She appeared with him in the kirk every Sabbath, dressed not ostentatiously, but still in a way that showed she intended him not for a life of manual labour. Perhaps, at first, some half thought that she was too proud of him; but that was a suggestion not to be cherished, for all acknowledged that he was sure to prove an honour to the parish in which he was born. She often brought him to the Manse, and earth did not contain a happier creature than her, when her boy answered all my

questions, and modestly made his own simple, yet wise remarks, on the sacred subjects gradually unfolding before his understanding and his heart.

"Before he was twelve years of age he went to College—and his mother accompanied him to pass the winter in the city. Two small rooms she took near the Cathedral, and while he was at the classes, or reading alone, she was not idle, but strove to make a small sum to help to defray their winter's expenses. To her that retired cell was a heaven when she looked upon her pious and studious boy. His genius was soon conspicuous; for four winters he pursued his studies in the University—returning always in summer to this hut, the door of which during their absence was closed. He made many friends, and frequently, during the three last summers, visitors came to pass a day at Braehead, in a rank of life far above his own. But in Scotland, thank God, talent, and learning, and genius, and virtue, when found in the poorest hut, go not without their admiration and their reward. Young as he is, he has had pupils of his own—his mother's little property has not been lessened at this hour by his education—and besides contributing to the support of her and himself, he has brought neater furniture into that lonely Hut, and there has he a library, limited in the number, but rich in the choice of books, such as contain food for years of silent thought to the Poor Scholar—if years indeed are to be his on earth."

We rose to proceed onwards to the Hut, across one smooth level of greenest herbage, and up one intervening knowe a little lower than the mount on which it stood. Why, thought I, has the old Man always spoken of the Poor Scholar as if he had been speaking of one now dead? Can it be, from the hints he has dropped, that this youth, so richly endowed, is under the doom of death, and the fountain of all those clear and fresh-gushing thoughts about to be sealed? I asked, as we walked along, if Isaac Blane seemed marked out to be one of those sweet flowers "no sooner blown than blasted," and who perish away like the creatures of a dream? The old Man made answer that it was even so—that he had been unable to attend College last winter—and that it was to be feared he was now far advanced in a hopeless decline. "Simple is he still as a very child—but with a sublime sense of duty to God and man—of profound affection and humanity never to be appeased towards all the brethren of our race. Each month—each week—each day has seemed visibly to bring him new stores of silent feeling and thought—and even now, boy as he is, he is fit for the Ministry. But he has no hopes of living to that day—nor have I. The deep spirit of his piety is now blended with a sure prescience of an early death. Expect, therefore, to see him pale—emaciated—and sitting in the hut like a beautiful and blessed ghost."

We entered the Hut, but no one was in the room. The clock ticked solitarily—and on a table, beside a nearly extinguished peat fire, lay the open Bible, and a small volume, which, on lifting it up, I found to be a Greek Testament. "They have gone out to walk, or to sit down for an hour in the warm sunshine," said the old Man.—

"Let us sit down and wait their return. It will not be long." A long, low sigh, was heard in the silence, proceeding, as it seemed, from a small room adjoining that in which we were sitting, and of which the door was left half-open. The Minister looked into that room, and, after a long earnest gaze, stepped softly back to me again, with a solemn face, and taking me by the hand, whispered to me to come with him to that door, which he gently moved. On a low bed lay the poor scholar, dressed as he had been for the day, stretched out in a stillness too motionless and profound for sleep, and with his fixed face up to heaven. We saw that he was dead. His mother was kneeling, with her face on the bed, and covered with both her hands. Then she lifted up her eyes and said, "O Merciful Redeemer, who wrought that miracle on the child of the Widow of Nain, comfort me, comfort me, in this my sore distress! I know that my Son is never to rise again until the great Judgment-day. But not the less do I bless Thy holy name—for Thou didst die to save us sinners!"

She arose from her knees, and, still blind to every other object, went up to his breast. "I thought thee lovelier, when alive, than any of the sons of the children of men—but that smile is beyond the power of a mother's heart to sustain." And, stooping down, she kissed his lips, and cheeks, and eyes, and forehead, with a hundred soft, streaming, and murmuring kisses, and then stood up in her solitary hut, alone and childless, with a long mortal sigh, in which all earthly feelings seemed breathed out, and all earthly ties broken. Her eyes wandered towards the door, and fixed themselves with a ghastly and unconscious gaze for a few moments on the grey locks and withered countenance of the old holy Man, bent towards her with a pitying and benignant air, and stooped, too, in the posture of devotion. She soon recognised the best friend of her Son, and leaving the bed on which his body lay, she came out into the room, and said, "You have come to me at a time when your presence was sorely needed. Had you been here but a few minutes sooner, you would have seen my Isaac die!"

Unconsciously we were all seated; and the Widow, turning fervently to her venerated friend, said, "He was reading the Bible—he felt faint—and said feebly, 'Mother, attend me to my bed, and when I lie down, put your arm over my breast and kiss me.' I did just as he told me; and, on wiping away a tear or two vainly shed by me on my dear boy's face, I saw that his eyes, though open, moved not, and that the lids were fixed. He had gone to another world. See—sir! there is the Bible lying open at the place he was reading—God preserve my soul from repining—only a few, few minutes ago!"

The Minister took the Bible on his knees, and laying his right hand, without selection, on part of one of the pages that lay open, he read aloud the following verses:—

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

The Mother's heart seemed to be deeply blest for a while by these words. She gave a grateful smile to the old Man, and sat silent, moving her lips. At length, she again broke forth:—

"Oh! Death, whatever may have been our thoughts or fears, ever comes unexpectedly at last! My son often—often told me, that he was dying, and I saw that it was so ever since Christmas. But how could I prevent hope from entering my heart? His sweet happy voice—the calmness of his prayers—his smiles, that never left his face whenever he looked or spoke to me—his studies, still pursued as anxiously as ever—the interest he took in any little incident of our retired life—all forced me to believe at times that he was not yet destined to die. But why think on all these things now? Yes! I will always think of them, till I join him and my husband in Heaven!"

It seemed now as if the Widow had only noticed me for the first time. Her soul had been so engrossed with its passion of grief, and with the felt sympathy and compassion of my venerable friend. She asked me if I had known her son; and I answered, that if I had, I could not have sat there so composedly; but that I was no stranger to his incomparable excellence. and felt indeed for her grievous loss.

She listened to my words, but did not seem to hear them, and once more addressed the old Man. "He suffered much sickness, my poor boy. For although it was a consumption, that is not always an easy death. But soon as the sickness and the racking pain gave way to our united prayers, God and our Saviour made us happy; and sure he spake then as never mortal spake, kindling into a happiness that was beautiful to see, when I beheld his face marked by dissolution, and knew, even in those inspired moments, for I can call them nothing else, that ere long the dust was to lie on those lips now flowing over with heavenly music!"

We sat for some hours in the Widow's Hut, and the Minister several times prayed with her, at her own request. On rising to depart, he said that he would send up one of her dearest friends to pass the night with her, and help her to do the last offices to her son. But she replied that she wished to be left alone for that day and night, and would expect her friend in the morning. We went towards the outer door, and she, in a sort of sudden stupor, let us depart without any farewell words, and retired into the room where her son was lying. Casting back our eyes before our departure, we saw her steal into the bed beside the dead body, and drawing the head gently into her bosom, she lay down with him in her arms, and as if they had in that manner fallen asleep.

THE FORGERS.

"Let us sit down on this stone seat," said my aged friend, the pastor, "and I will tell yon a tale of tears concerning the last inhabitants of yonder solitary house, just visible on the hill-side, through the gloom of those melancholy pines. Ten years have passed away since the terrible catastrophe of which I am about to speak; and I know not how it is, but methinks, whenever I come into this glen, there is something rueful in its silence, while the common sounds of nature seem to my mind dirge-like and forlorn. Was not this very day bright and musical as we walked across all the other hills and valleys? but now a dim mist overspreads the sky, and, beautiful as this lonely place must in truth be, there is a want of life in the verdure and the flowers, as if they grew beneath the darkness of perpetual shadows."

As the old man was speaking, a female figure, bent with age and infirmity, came slowly up the bank below us with a pitcher in her hand, and when she reached a little well, dug out of a low rock all covered with moss and lichens, she seemed to fix her eyes upon it as in a dream, and gave a long, deep, broken sigh.

"The names of her husband and her only son, both dead, are chiselled by their own hands on a smooth stone within the arch of that fountain, and the childless widow at this moment sees nothing on the face of the earth but a few letters not yet overgrown with the creeping time-stains. See! her pale lips are moving in prayer, and, old as she is, and long resigned in her utter hopelessness, the tears are not yet all shed or dried up within her broken heart—a few big drops are on her withered cheeks, but she feels them not, and is unconsciously weeping with eyes that old age has of itself enough bedimmed."

The figure remained motionless beside the well; and, though I knew not the history of the griefs that stood all embodied so mournfully before me, I felt that they must have been gathering together for many long years, and that such sighs as I had now heard came from the uttermost desolation of the human heart. At last she dipped her pitcher in the water, lifted her eyes to Heaven, and distinctly saying, "O Jesus, Son of God! whose blood was shed for sinners, be merciful to their souls!" she turned away from the scene of her sorrow, and, like one seen in a vision, disappeared.

"I have beheld the childless widow happy," said the pastor, "even her who sat alone, with none to comfort her, on a floor swept by the hand of death of all its blossoms. But her whom we have now seen I dare not call happy, even though she puts her trust in God and her Saviour. Hers is an affliction which faith itself cannot assuage. Yet religion may have softened even sighs like those, and, as you shall hear, it was religion that set her free from the horrid dreams of madness, and restored her to that comfort which is always found in the possession of a reasonable soul."

There was not a bee roaming near us, nor a bird singing in the

solitary glen, when the old man gave me these hints of a melancholy tale. The sky was black and lowering as it lay on the silent hills, and enclosed us from the far-off world, in a sullen spot that was felt to be sacred unto sorrow. The figure which had come and gone with a sigh was the only dweller here; and I was prepared to hear a doleful history of one left alone to commune with a broken heart in the cheerless solitude of nature.

"That house, from whose chimneys no smoke has ascended for ten long years," continued my friend, "once showed its windows bright with cheerful fires; and her whom we now saw so woe-begone, I remember brought home a youthful bride, in all the beauty of her joy and innocence. Twenty years beheld her a wife and a mother, with all their most perfect happiness, and with some, too, of their inevitable griefs. Death passed not by her door without his victims, and of five children, all but one died in infancy, childhood, or blooming youth. But they died in nature's common decay; peaceful prayers were said around the bed of peace; and when the flowers grew upon their graves, the mother's eyes could bear to look on them, as she passed on with an unaching heart into the house of God. All but one died—and better had it been if that one had never been born.

"Father, mother, and son now come to man's estate, survived, and in the house there was peace. But suddenly poverty fell upon them. The dishonesty of a kinsman, of which I need not state the particulars, robbed them of their few hereditary fields, which now passed into the possession of a stranger. They, however, remained as tenants in the house which had been their own; and for a while father and son bore the change of fortune seemingly undismayed, and toiled as common labourers on the soil still dearly beloved. At the dawn of light they went out together, and at twilight they returned. But it seemed as if their industry was in vain. Year after year the old man's face became more deeply furrowed, and more seldom was he seen to smile; and his son's countenance, once bold and open, was now darkened with anger and dissatisfaction. They did not attend public worship so regularly as they used to do; when I met them in the fields, or visited them in their dwelling, they looked on me coldly, and with altered eyes; and I grieved to think how soon they both seemed to have forgotten the blessings Providence had so long permitted them to enjoy, and how sullenly they now struggled with its decrees. But something worse than poverty was now disturbing both their hearts.

"The unhappy old man had a brother who at this time died, leaving an only son, who had for many years abandoned his father's house, and of whom all tidings had long been lost. It was thought by many that he had died beyond seas; and none doubted that, living or dead, he had been disinherited by his stern and unrelenting parent. On the day after the funeral, the old man produced his brother's will, by which he became heir to all his property, except an annuity to be paid to the natural heir, should he ever return. Some pitied the prodigal son who had been disinherited—some blamed the father—some envied the good fortune of those who had so ill borne adversity.

But in a short time the death, the will, and the disinherited, were all forgotten, and the lost lands being redeemed, peace, comfort, and happiness were supposed again to be restored to the dwelling from which they had so long been banished.

"But it was not so. If the furrows on the old man's face were deep before, when he had to toil from morning to night, they seemed to have sunk into more ghastly trenches, now that the goodness of Providence had restored a gentle shelter to his declining years. When seen wandering through his fields at even-tide, he looked not like the patriarch musing tranquilly on the works and ways of God; and when my eyes met his during divine service, which he now again attended with scrupulous regularity, I sometimes thought they were suddenly averted in conscious guilt, or closed in hypocritical devotion. I scarcely know if I had any suspicions against him in my mind or not; but his high bald head, thin silver hair, and countenance with its fine features so intelligent, had no longer the same solemn expression which they once possessed, and something dark and hidden seemed now to belong to them, which withstood his forced and unnatural smile. The son, who, in the days of their former prosperity, had been stained by no vice, and who, during their harder lot, had kept himself aloof from all his former companions, now became dissolute and profligate, nor did he meet with any reproof from a father whose heart would once have burst asunder at one act of wickedness in his beloved child.

"About three years after the death of his father, the disinherited son returned to his native parish. He had been a sailor on board various ships on foreign stations, but hearing by chance of his father's death, he came to claim his inheritance. Having heard, on his arrival, that his uncle had succeeded to the property, he came to me and told me that the night before he left his home, his father stood by his bedside, kissed him, and said, that never more would he own such an undutiful son—but that he forgave him all his sins—at death would not defraud him of the pleasant fields that had so long belonged to his humble ancestors—and hoped to meet reconciled in heaven. 'My uncle is a villain,' said he fiercely, 'and I will cast anchor on the green bank where I played when a boy, even if I must first bring his grey head to the scaffold!'

"I accompanied him to the house of his uncle. It was a dreadful visit. The family had just sat down to their frugal mid-day meal; and the old man, though for some years he could have little heart to pray, had just lifted up his hand to ask a blessing. Our shadows, as we entered the door, fell upon the table; and, turning his eyes, he beheld before him on the floor, the man whom he fearfully hoped had been buried in the sea. His face was indeed at that moment most unlike that of prayer, but he still held up his lean, shrivelled, trembling hand.

"'Accursed hypocrite,' cried the fierce mariner, 'dost thou call down the blessing of God on a meal won basely from the orphan? But, lo! God, whom thou hast blasphemed, has sent me from the

distant isles of the ocean to bring thy white head into the hangman's hands!'

"For a moment all was silent—then a loud stifled gasping was heard, and she whom you saw a little while ago, rose shrieking from her seat, and fell down on her knees at the sailor's feet. The terror of that unforgiven crime, now first revealed to her knowledge, struck her down to the floor. She fixed her bloodless face on his before whom she knelt—but she spoke not a single word. There was a sound in her convulsed throat, like the death-rattle."

"'I forged the will,' said the son, advancing towards his cousin with a firm step, 'my father could not—I alone am guilty—I alone must die.'

"The wife soon recovered the power of speech, but it was so unlike her usual voice, that I scarcely thought at first the sound proceeded from her white quivering lips. 'As you hope for mercy at the great judgment-day, let the old man make his escape—hush, hush, hush!—till in a few days he has sailed away in the hold of some ship to America. You surely will not hang an old grey-headed man of threescore and ten years!'

"The sailor stood silent and frowning. There seemed neither pity nor cruelty in his face; he felt himself injured—and looked resolved to right himself, happen what would. 'I say he has forged my father's will. As to escaping, let him escape if he can. I do not wish to hang him, though I have seen better men run up to the foreyard-arm before now, for only asking their own. But no more kneeling, woman. Holla! where is the old man gone?

"We all looked ghastly around, and the wretched wife, and mother, springing to her feet, rushed out of the house. We followed, one and all. The door of the stable was open, and the mother and son entering, loud shrieks were heard. The miserable old man had slunk out of the room unobserved during the passion that had struck all our souls, and had endeavoured to commit suicide. His own son cut him down, as he hung suspended from a rafter in that squalid place, and, carrying him in his arms, laid him down upon the green bank in front of the house. There he lay with his livid face and blood-shot protruded eyes, till, in a few minutes, he raised himself up, and fixed them upon his wife, who, soon recovering from a fainting fit, came shrieking from the mire in which she had fallen down.

"'Poor people!' said the sailor, with a gasping voice, 'you have suffered enough for your crime. Fear nothing—the worst is now past; and rather would I sail the seas twenty years longer, than add another pang to that old man's heart. Let us be kind to the old man.'

"But it seemed as if a raven had croaked the direful secret all over the remotest places among the hills, for, in an hour, people came flocking in from all quarters, and it was seen that concealment or escape was no longer possible, and that father and son were destined to die together a felon's death."

Here the pastor's voice ceased; and I had heard enough to under-

stand the long deep sigh that had come moaning from that bowed-down figure beside the solitary well. "That was the last work done by the father and son, and finished the day before the fatal discovery of their guilt. It had probably been engaged in as a sort of amusement to beguile their unhappy minds of ever-anxious thoughts, or perhaps as a solitary occupation, at which they could unburden their guilt to one another undisturbed. Here, no doubt, in the silence and solitude, they often felt remorse, perhaps penitence. They chiselled out their names on that slab, as you perceive; and hither, as duly as the morning and evening shadows, comes the ghost whom we beheld, and, after a prayer for the souls of them so tenderly beloved in their innocence, and doubtless even more tenderly beloved in their guilt and in their graves, she carries to her lonely hut the water that helps to preserve her hopeless life, from the well dug by dearest hands, now mouldered away, both flesh and bone, into the dust."

After a moment's silence, the old man continued—for he saw that I longed to hear the details of that dreadful catastrophe, and his own soul seemed likewise desirous of renewing its grief,—"The prisoners were condemned. Hope there was none. It was known, from the moment of the verdict—guilty—that they would be executed. Petitions were, indeed, signed by many, many thousands; but it was all in vain—and the father and the son had to prepare themselves for death.

"About a week after condemnation I visited them in their cell. God forbid I should say that they were resigned! Human nature could not resign itself to such a doom; and I found the old man pacing up and down the stone floor, in his clanking chains, with hurried steps, and a countenance of unspeakable horror. The son was lying on his face upon his bed of straw, and had not lifted up his head as the massy bolts were withdrawn, and the door creaked sullenly on its hinges. The father fixed his eyes upon me for some time, as if I had been a stranger intruding upon his misery; and, as soon as he knew me, shut them with a deep groan, and pointed to his son. 'I have murdered William—I have brought my only son to the scaffold, and I am doomed to hell!' I gently called on the youth by name, but he was insensible — he was lying in a fit. 'I fear he will awake out of that fit,' cried the old man with a broken voice. 'They have come upon him every day since our condemnation, and sometimes during the night. It is not fear for himself that brings them on—for my boy, though guilty, is brave—but he continues looking on my face for hours, till, at last, he seems to lose all sense, and falls down in strong convulsions, often upon the stone floor, till he is all covered with blood.' The old man then went up to his son, knelt down, and, putting aside the thick clustering hair from his forehead, continued kissing him for some minutes, with deep sobs, but eyes dry as dust.

"But why should I recall to my remembrance, or describe to you, every hour of anguish that I witnessed in that cell? For several weeks it was all agony and despair—the Bible lay unheeded before their ghastly eyes—and for them there was no consolation. The old

man's soul was filled but with one thought—that he had deluded his son into sin, death, and eternal punishment. He never slept; but visions, terrible as those of sleep, seemed often to pass before him, till I have seen the grey hairs bristle horribly over his temples, and big drops of sweat plash down upon the floor. I sometimes thought that they would both die before the day of execution; but their mortal sorrows, though they sadly changed both face and frame, seemed at last to give a horrible energy to life; and every morning that I visited them, they were stronger, and more broadly awake in the chill silence of their lonesome prison-house.

"I know not how a deep change was at last wrought upon their souls, but two days before that of execution, on entering their cell, I found them sitting calm and composed by each other's side, with the Bible open before them. Their faces, though pale and haggard, had lost that glare of misery that so long had shone about their restless and wandering eyes, and they looked like men recovering from a long and painful sickness. I almost thought I saw something like a faint smile of hope. 'God has been merciful unto us,' said the father, with a calm voice.—'I must not think that He has forgiven my sins, but He has enabled me to look on my poor son's face — to kiss him—to fold him in my arms—to pray for him—to fall asleep with him in my bosom, as I used often to do in the days of his boyhood, when, during the heat of mid-day, I rested from labour below the trees of my own farm. We have found resignation at last, and are prepared to die.'

"There were no transports of deluded enthusiasm in the souls of these unhappy men. They had never doubted the truth of revealed religion, although they had fatally disregarded its precepts; and now that remorse had given way to penitence, and nature had become reconciled to the thought of inevitable death, the light that had been darkened, but never extinguished in their hearts, rose up anew; and knowing that their souls were immortal, they humbly put their faith in the mercy of their Creator and their Redeemer.

"It was during that resigned and serene hour that the old man ventured to ask for the mother of his poor unhappy boy. I told him the truth calmly, and calmly he heard it all. On the day of his condemnation, she had been deprived of her reason, and in the house of a kind friend, whose name he blessed, now remained in merciful ignorance of all that had befallen, believing herself, indeed, to be a motherless widow, but one who had long ago lost her husband, and all her children, in the ordinary course of nature. At this recital his soul was satisfied. The son said nothing, but wept long and bitterly.

"The day of execution came at last. The great city lay still as on the morning of the Sabbath-day; and all the ordinary business of life seemed, by one consent of the many thousand hearts beating there, to be suspended. But as the hours advanced, the frequent tread of feet was heard in every avenue; the streets began to fill with pale, anxious, and impatient faces; and many eyes were turned to the dials on the steeples, watching the silent progress of the finger

of time, till it should reach the point at which the curtain was to be drawn up from before a most mournful tragedy.

"The hour was faintly heard through the thick prison walls by us, who were together for the last time in the condemned cell. I had administered to them the most awful rite of our religion, and father and son sat together as silent as death. The door of the dungeon opened, and several persons came in. One of them, who had a shrivelled bloodless face and small red fiery eyes, an old man, feeble and tottering, but cruel in his decrepitude, laid hold of the son with his palsied fingers, and began to pinion his arms with a cord. No resistance was offered; but, straight and untrembling, stood that tall and beautiful youth while the fiend bound him for execution. At this mournful sight, how could I bear to look on his father's face? Yet thither were mine eyes impelled by the agony that afflicted my commiserating soul. During that hideous gaze, he was insensible of the executioner's approach towards himself; and all the time that the cords were encircling his own arms, he felt them not — he saw nothing but his son standing at last before him, ready for the scaffold.

"I dimly recollect a long dark vaulted passage, and the echoing tread of footsteps, till all at once we stood in a crowded hall, with a thousand eyes fixed on these two miserable men. How unlike were they to all beside! They sat down together within the shadow of death. Prayers were said, and a psalm was sung, in which their voices were heard to join, with tones that wrung out tears from the hardest or the most careless heart. Often had I heard those voices singing in my own peaceful church, before evil had disturbed, or misery broken them;—but the last word of the psalm was sung, and the hour of their departure was come.

"They stood, at last, upon the scaffold. That long street, that seemed to stretch away interminably from the old Prison-house, was paved with uncovered heads; for, the moment these ghosts appeared, that mighty crowd felt reverence for human nature so terribly tried, and prayers and blessings, passionately ejaculated or convulsively stifled, went hovering over all the multitude as if they feared some great calamity to themselves, and felt standing on the first tremor of an earthquake.

"It was a most beautiful summer's day on which they were led out to die; and as the old man raised his eyes, for the last time, to the sky, the clouds lay motionless on that blue translucent arch, and the sun shone joyously over the magnificent heavens. It seemed a day made for happiness or for mercy. But no pardon dropped down from these smiling skies, and the vast multitude were not to be denied the troubled feast of death. Many who now stood there wished they had been in the heart of some far-off wood or glen; there was shrieking and fainting, not only among maids, and wives, and matrons, who had come there in the mystery of their hearts, but men fell down in their strength—for it was an overwhelming thing to behold a father and his only son now haltered for a shameful death. 'Is my father with me on the scaffold?—give me his hand, for I see him not.' I

joined their hands together, and at that moment the great bell in the Cathedral tolled, but I am convinced neither of them heard the sound. For a moment there seemed to be no such thing as sound in the world; and then all at once the multitude heaved like the sea, and uttered a wild yelling shriek.—Their souls were in eternity—and I fear not to say, not an eternity of grief."

THE FAMILY TRYST.

THE fire had received an addition of a large ash-root and a heap of peats, and was beginning both to crackle and blaze; the hearthstone was tidily swept—the supper-table set—and every seat, bench, chair, and stool occupied by its customary owner, except the high-backed, carved, antique oaken armed-chair, belonging exclusively to the Goodman. Innocence, labour, contentment, and mirth were here all assembled together in the wide low-roofed kitchen of this sheltered farm-house, called, from its situation in a low woody dell, The How; and all that was wanting to make the happiness complete was Abel Alison himself, the master and father of the family. It seemed to them that he was rather later than usual in returning from the city, whither he went every market-day. But though it was a boisterous night in April, with a good drift of snow going, they had no apprehensions whatever of his safety; and when they heard the trampling of his horse's feet on the gravel, up sprang half-a-dozen creatures of various sizes to hail him at the door, and to conduct the colt—for so they continued to call a horse now about fifteen years old—to his fresh-strawed stall in the byre. All was right—Abel entered with his usual smile, his wife helped him off with his great-coat, which had a respectable sprinkling of snow and stiffening of frost; he assumed his usual seat, or, as his youngest son and namesake, who was the wit of the family, called it, his throne; and supper immediately smoking on the board, a blessing was said, and a flourish of wooden spoons ensued.

Supper being over, and a contented silence prevailing, with an occasional whispered remark of merriment or affection circling round, Abel Alison rested himself with more than his usual formality against the back of his chair, and putting on not an unhappy, but a grave face, told his wife, and family, and servants, all to make up their minds to hear some very bad news nearly affecting themselves. There was something too anxiously serious in his look, voice, and attitude, to permit a thought of his wishing to startle them for a moment by some false alarm. So at once they were all hushed—young and old—and turned towards their father with fixed countenances and anxious eyes.

"Wife—and children—there is no need, surely, to go round about the bush—I will tell you the worst in a word. I am ruined. That

is to say, all my property is lost—gone—and we must leave the How. There is no help for it—we must leave the How."

His wife's face grew pale, and for a short space she said nothing. A slight convulsive motion went over all the circle as if they had been one body, or an electric shock had struck them all sitting together with locked hands. "Leave the How!" one voice sobbing exclaimed—it was a female voice—but it was not repeated, and it was uncertain from whom it came.

"Why, Abel," said his wife calmly, who had now perfectly recovered herself, "if we must leave the How, we must leave a bonny sheltered spot, where we have seen many happy days. But what then? surely there may be contentment found many a where else besides in this cheerful room, and round about our birken banks and braes. For mysel', I shall not lose a night's rest at the thought, if you, Abel, can bear it—and, God bless you, I have known you bear a severer blow than this!"

Abel Alison was a free, warm-hearted man, of a happy disposition, and always inclined to look at everything in a favourable light. He was also a most industrious hard-working man. But he could not always say "nay,"—and what he earned with a month's toil he had more than once lost by a moment's easy good-nature. He had some time before imprudently become surety for an acquaintance, who had no such rightful claim upon him—that acquaintance was a man of no principle—and Abel was now ruined—utterly and irretrievably ruined. Under such circumstances, he could not be altogether without self-reproach—and the kind magnanimity of his wife now brought the tear into his eye. "Ay—ay—I was just the old man in that foolish business. I should have remembered you, Alice—and all my bairns. But I hope—I know you will forgive me—for having thus been the means of bringing you all to poverty."

Upon this, Abel's eldest son, a young man about twenty years of age, stood up, and first looking with the most respectful tenderness upon his Father, and then with a cheerful smile upon all around, said, "Father, never more utter these words—never more have these thoughts. You have fed us—clothed us—educated us—taught us what is our duty to God and man. It rests with ourselves to practise it. We all love you—Father—we are all grateful—we would all lay down our lives to save yours. But there is no need for that now. What has happened? Nothing. Are we not all well—all strong—cannot we all work? As God is my witness, and knows my heart, I now declare before you, Father, that this is not a visitation, but it is a blessing. Now it will be tried whether we love you, Father—whether you have prayed every morning and every night for more than twenty years for ungrateful children—whether your toil in sun, and rain, and snow, has been thankless toil—or whether we will not all rally round your grey head, and find it a pleasant shelter—a smooth pillow—and a plenteous board;"—and with that he unconsciously planted his foot more firmly on the floor, and stretched out his right arm, standing there a tall, straight, powerful stripling, in whom there was visible protection and succour for his parents and their declining age.

One spirit kindled over all—not a momentary flash of enthusiasm, not a mere movement of pity and love towards their Father, which might give way to dissatisfaction and despondency,—but a true, deep, clear reconcilement of their souls to their lot, and a resolution not to be shaken in its unquaking power by any hardships either in anticipation or reality. Abel Alison saw and felt this, and his soul burned within him. "We shall all go to service—no shame in that. But we shall have time enough to consider of all these points before the term-day. We have some weeks before us at the How—and let us make the most of them. Wife, children, are you all happy?"

"All—all—perfectly happy—happier than ever," was the general burst of the reply.

"Stir up that fire—my merry little Abel," said the mother,—"and let us have a good, full, bright blaze on your father's face. God bless him!"

Abel brandished an immense poker in both hands, and after knitting his brows, and threatening to aim a murderous blow on the temples of the beautiful little Alice on her stool close to the ingle, and at her father's feet, a practical joke that seemed infinitely amusing, he gave the great ash-root a thump that sent a thousand sparkling gems up the wide chimney, and then placing the poker under it like a lever, he hoisted up the burning mass till a blaze of brightness dazzled all their eyes, and made Luath start up from his slumbers on the hearth.

"Come, Alice"—said the father, for we must not be cheated out of our music as well as our money—"let us have your song as usual, my bonny linnet—something that suits the season—cheerful and mournful at the same time—'Auld lang syne' or 'Lochaber no more.'" "I will sing them baith—Father—first the ane and then the ither"—and as her sweet silver pipe trilled plaintively along, now and then other voices, and among them that of old Abel himself, were heard joining in the touching air.

"What think you o' the singing this night—my gude dog, Luath?" quoth little cunning Abel, taking the dumb creature's offered paw into his hand. "But do you know, Luath—you greedy fellow, who have often stolen my cheese and bread on the hill when my head was turned—though you are no thief either, Luath—I say, sir, do you know that we are all going to be—starved? Come—here is the last mouthful of cake you will ever have all the days of your life—henceforth you must eat grass like a sheep. Hold your nose—sir—there—one—two—three! Steady—snap—swallow! Well catched! Digest that and be thankful."

"Children," said the old man, "suppose we make a Family Tryst, which, if we be all alive, let us religiously keep—ay—religiously, for it will be a day either of fast or of thanksgiving. Let us all meet on the term-day, that is, I believe, the twelfth of May come a twelvemonth, on the green plot of ground beside the Shaw Linn, in which we have for so many years washed our sheep. It is a bonny, lown, quiet spot, where nobody will come to disturb us. We will all meet together before the gloaming, and compare the stories of our year's

life and doings, and say our prayers together in the open air, and beneath the moon and stars." The proposal was joyfully agreed to by all.

Family worship was now performed. Abel Alison prayed as fervently, and with as grateful a heart, as he had done the night before. For his piety did not keep an account-current of debtor and creditor with God. All was God's—of his own he had nothing. God had chosen to vary to him the mode and place of his few remaining years on earth. Was that a cause for repining? God had given him health, strength, a loving wife, dutiful children, a good conscience. No palsy had stricken him—no fever devoured him—no blindness darkened his path. Only a few grey hairs were as yet sprinkled among the black. His boys could bear being looked at and spoken to in any company, gentle or simple; and his daughters, they were like the water-lilies, that are serene in the calm clear water, but no less serene among the black and scowling waves. So Abel Alison and all his family lay down on their beds; and long before midnight they were all fast asleep.

The time came when the farm—the bonny farm of the How, was given up, and another family took possession. Abel's whole stock was taken by the new tenant, who was a good, and honest, and merciful man, at a fair valuation. With the sum thus got, Abel paid all his debts—that large fatal one—and his few small ones at the carpenter's shop, the smithy, and Widow Anderson's, the green, grey, black, brown, and white grocer of the village; and then he and his family were left without a shilling. Yet none pitied them—they were above pity. They would all have scorned either to beg or borrow, for many of their neighbours were as poor, and not a great many much richer than themselves, after all; and therefore they set their cheerful faces against the blast, and it was never felt to touch them. The eldest son immediately hired himself at high wages, for his abilities, skill, and strength were well known, as head servant with the richest farmer in the next parish—which was famous for its agriculture. The second son, who was of an ingenious and thoughtful cast of character, engaged himself as one of the under-gardeners at Pollock-Castle—and the third, Abel the wag, became a shepherd with an old friend of his father's, within a few hundred yards of the How. The eldest daughter went into service in the family of the Laird of Southfield, one of the most respectable in the parish. The second was kindly taken into the Manse, as a nurse to the younger children, and a companion to the elder—and Alice, who, from her sweet voice, was always called the Linnet, became a shepherdess along with her brother Abel. The mother went to the Hall to manage the dairy—the Baronet being a great man for cheese and butter—and the father lived with her in a small cottage near the Hall-gate, employing himself in every kind of work that offered itself, for he was a neat-handed man, and few things, out of doors or in, came amiss to his fingers, whether it required a delicate touch or a strong blow. Thus were they all settled to their hearts' content before the hedgerows were quite green—and though somewhat scattered, yet were they all within two hours' journey of

each other, and their hearts were all as close together as when inhabiting the sweet, lown, bird-nestlike cottage of the How.

The year with all its seasons fleeted happily by—the long warm months of Summer, when the night brings coolness rather than the shut of light—the fitful, broken, and tempestuous Autumn—the Winter, whose short, but severe days of toil in the barn and cheerful fireside nights, with all their work, and all their amusements—soon—too soon, it is often felt, give way to the open weather and active life of Spring—the busy, working, enlivening Spring itself—were now flown by—and it was now the day of the *Family Tryst*, the dear Twelfth Day of the beautiful but capricious month of May.

Had any one died whose absence would damp the joy and hilarity of the Family Tryst, and make it a meeting for the shedding of tears? No. A kind God had counted the beatings of every pulse, and kept the blood of them all in a tranquil flow. The year had not passed by without many happy greetings—they had met often and often—at church—at market—on chance visits at neighbours' houses—and not rarely at the cottage at the Hall-gate. There had been nothing deserving the name of separation. Yet, now that the hour of the *Family Tryst* was near at hand, all their hearts bounded within them, and they saw before them all day, that smooth verdant-plat, and heard the delightful sound of that Waterfall.

The day had been cheerful, both with breezes and with sunshine, and not a rain-cloud had shown itself in the sky. Towards the afternoon the wind fell, and nature became more serenely beautiful every minute as the evening was coming on with its silent dews. The Parents came first to the Trysting-place, cheered as they approached it down the woody glen, by the deepening voice of the Shaw Linn. Was that small turf-built Altar, and the circular turf-seat that surrounded it, built by fairy hands? They knew at once that some of their happy children had so employed a few leisure evening hours, and they sat down on the little mound with hearts overflowing with silent—perhaps speechless gratitude.

But they sat not long there by themselves—beloved faces, at short intervals, came smiling upon them—one through the coppice-wood, where there was no path—another across the meadow—a third appeared with a gladsome shout on the cliff of the waterfall—a fourth seemed to rise out of the very ground before them—and last of all came, preceded by the sound of laughter and of song, with which the calm air was stirred, Abel and Alice, the fairies who had reared that green grassy Altar, and who, from their covert in the shade, had been enjoying the gradual assemblage. "Blessings be to our God—not a head is wanting," said the Father, unable to contain his tears—"this night could I die in peace!"

Little Abel and Alice, who from their living so near the spot had taken upon themselves the whole management of the evening's ceremonial, brought forth from a bush where they had concealed them, a basket of bread and cheese and butter, a jar of milk, and another of honey—and placed them upon the turf—as if they had been a rural gift to some rural deity. "I thought you would be all

hungry," said Abel, "after your trudge—and as for Simon there, the jolly gardener, he will eat all the kibbock himself, if I do not keep a sharp eye upon him. Simon was always a sure hand at a meal. But, Alice, reach me over the milk-jar. Ladies and gentlemen, all your very good healths—Our noble selves." This was felt to be very fair wit of Abel's—and there was an end to the old Man's tears.

"I vote," quoth Abel, "that every man (beginning with myself, who will be the oldest man among you when I have lived long enough) give an account of himself, and produce whatever of the ready rhino he may have made, found, or stolen, since he left the How. However, I will give way to my Father—now for it, Father—let us hear if you have been a good boy."—"Will that imp never hold its tongue?" cried the mother, making room for him at the same time on the turf-seat by her side—and beckoning him with a smile, which he obeyed, to occupy it.

"Well, then," quoth the father, "I have not been sitting with my hands folded, or leaning on my elbows. Among other small matters, I have helped to lay about half a mile of high-road on the Macadam plan, across the lang quagmire on the Mearns Muir, so that nobody need be sucked in there again for fifty years to come at the very soonest. With my own single pair of hands I have built about thirty rood of stone-dyke five feet high, with two rows of through-stones, connecting Saunders Mill's garden-wall with the fence round the Fir Belt. I have delved to some decent purpose on some half-score of neighbours' kail-yards, and clipped their hedges round and straight, not forgetting to dock a bit off the tails o' some o' the peacocks, and outlandish birds on that queer auld-fashioned terrace at Malletsheugh. I cannot have mown under some ten braid Scots acres of ryegrass and meadow-hay together, but finding my back stiff in the stooping, I was a stooker and a bandster on the corn-rigs. I have thrashed a few thrieves in the minister's barn—prime oats they were, for the glebe had been seven years in lea. I have gone some dozen times to Lesmahago for the clear-lowing coals, a drive of forty miles back and forward, I'se warrant it. I have felled and boughed about forty ash-trees, and lent a hand now and then in the sawpit. I also let some o' the daylight into the fir wood at Hallside, and made a bonny bit winding walk along the burn-side for the young ladies' feet. So, to make a long story short, there is a receipt (clap a bit o' turf on't, Abel, to keep it frae fleeing off the daisies) from the Savings Bank, for £25, 13s., signed by Bailie Trumbell's ain hand. That is a sight gude for sair een! Now, Mrs Alison, for I must give you the title you bear at the Hall, what say you?"

"I have done nothing but superintended the making o' butter and cheese, the one as rich as Dutch, and the other preferable to Stilton. My wages are just fifteen pounds, and there they are. Lay them down beside your Father's receipt. But I have more to tell. If ever we are able to take a bit farm of our own again, my Lady has promised to give me the Ayrshire Hawkie, that yields sixteen pints

a-day for months at a time, o' real rich milkness. She would bring £20 in any market. So count that £35, my bonny bairns. Speak out, my Willie—no fear but you have a good tale to tell."

"There is a receipt for thirty pounds, lent this blessed day, at five per cent, to auld Laird Shaw—as safe as the ground we tread upon. My wages are forty pounds a-year, as you know—and I have twice got the first prize at the Competition o' Ploughmen—thanks to you, Father, for that. The rest of the money is gone upon fine clothes and upon the bonny lasses on a Fair-day. Why should not we have our enjoyments in this world as well as richer folk?"—"God bless you, Willie," said the old man; "you would not let me nor your mother part with our Sunday's clothes, when that crash came upon us—though we were willing to do so, to right all our creditors. You became surety for the amount—and you have paid it—I know that. Well—it may not be worth speaking about—but it is worth thinking about, Willie—and a Father need not be ashamed to receive a kindness from his own flesh and blood."

"It is my turn now," said Andrew, the young gardener. "There is twelve pounds—and next year it will be twenty. I am to take the flower-garden into my own hand—and let the Paisley florists look after their pinks, and tulips, and anemones, or I know where the prizes will come after this. There's a bunch o' flowers for you, Alice—if you put them in water they will live till the Sabbath-day, and you may put some of them into your bonnet. Father, William said he had to thank you for his ploughmanship—so have I for my gardening. And wide and rich as the flower-garden is that I am to take now under my own hand, do you think I will ever love it better, or sae weel, as the bit plot on the bank-side, with its bower in the corner, the birks hanging ower it without keeping off the sun, and the clear burnie wimpling away at its foot? There I first delved with a small spade o' my ain—you put the shaft in yourself, Father—and, trust me, it will be a while before that piece o' wood gangs into the fire."

"Now for my speech," said Abel—"short and sweet is my motto. I like something pithy. Lo and behold! a mowdiwart's skin, with five-and-forty shillings in silver! It goes to my heart to part with them. Mind, Father, I only lend them to you. And if you do not repay them, with two shillings and better of interest, next May-day, old style, I will put the affair into the hands of scranky Pate Orr, the writer, at Thorny-bank. But hold—will you give me what is called heritable security? That means land, doesn't it? Well, then, turf is land—and I thus fling down the mowdiwart purse on the turf—and that is lending money on heritable security."

A general laugh rewarded this ebullition of genius from Abel, who received such plaudits with a face of cunning solemnity—and then the eldest daughter meekly took up the word and said—

"My wages were nine pounds—there they are!"

"Oh, ho!" cried Abel, "who gave you, Agnes, that bonny blue spotted silk handkerchief round your neck, and that bonny, but gey droll-patterned gown? You had not these at the How; maybe

you got them from your sweetheart." And Agnes blushed in her innocence like the beautiful flower—"Celestial rosy red, Love's proper hue."

The little Nourice from the Manse laid down on the turf, without speaking, but with a heartsome smile, her small wage of four pounds; and, last of all, the little fair-haired, blue-eyed, snowy-skinned Alice, the shepherdess, with motion soft as light, and with a voice sweet as an air-harp, placed her wages too beside the rest. "There is a golden guinea—it is to be two next year, and so on till I am fifteen. Every little helps." And her father took her to his heart, and kissed her glistening ringlets and her smiling eyes, that happily shut beneath the touch of his loving lips.

By this time the sun had declined, and the sweet sober gloaming was about to melt into the somewhat darker beauty of a summer night. The air was now still and silent, as if unseen creatures that had been busy there had all gone to rest. The mavis that had been singing loud, and mellow, and clear, on the highest point of a larch, now and then heard by the party in their happiness, had flitted down to be near his mate on her nest within the hollow root of an old ivy-wreathed yew-tree. The snow-white cony looked out from the coppice, and, bending his long ears towards the laughing scene, drew back unstartled into the thicket.

"Nay, nay, Luath," whispered Abel, patting his dog that was between his knees, "you must not kill the poor bit white rabbit. But if a maukin would show herself, I would let thee take a brattle after her through the wood; for she would only cock her fud at a' thy yelping, and land thee in a net o' briers to scratch thy hide and tangle thy tail in. You canna catch a maukin, Luath—they're ower souple for you, you fat lazy tyke."

The old man now addressed his children with a fervent voice, and told them that their dutiful behaviour to him, their industrious habits, their moral conduct in general, and their regard to their religious duties, all made them a blessing to him, for which he never could be sufficiently thankful to the Giver of all mercies. "Money," said he, "is well called the root of all evil—but not so now. There it lies upon that turf, an offering from poor children to their poor parents. It is a beautiful sight, my bairns; but your parents need it not. They have enough. May God for ever bless you, my dear bairns! That night at the How, I said this meeting would be either a fast or a thanksgiving, and that we would praise God with a prayer, and also the voice of psalms. No house is near—no path by which any one will be coming at this quiet hour. So let us worship our Maker—here is the Bible."

"Father," said the eldest son, "will you wait a few minutes, for I am every moment expecting two dear friends to join us? Listen—I hear footsteps and the sound of voices round the corner of the coppice. They are at hand."

A beautiful young woman, dressed almost in the same manner as a farmer's daughter, but with a sort of sylvan grace about her that seemed to denote a somewhat higher station, now appeared, along

with a youth who might be her brother. Kindly greetings were interchanged, and room being made for them, they formed part of the circle round the altar of turf. A sweet surprise was in the hearts of the party at this addition to their number, and every face brightened with a new delight.

"That is bonny Sally Mather of the Burn-house," whispered little Alice to her brother Abel. "She passed me ae day on the brae, and made me the present of a comb for my hair, you ken, when you happened to be on the ither side o' the wood. Oh! Abel, hasna she the bonniest and the sweetest een that ever you saw smile?"

This young woman, who appeared justly so beautiful in the eyes of little Alice, was even more so in those of her eldest brother. She was sitting at his side, and the wide earth did not contain two happier human beings than these humble, virtuous, and sincere lovers. Sally Mather was the beauty of the parish, and she was also an heiress, or rather now the owner of the Burn-house, a farm worth about a hundred a-year, and one of the pleasantest situations in a parish remarkable for the picturesque and romantic character of its scenery. She had received a much better education than young women generally do in her rank of life, her father having been a common farmer; but, by successful skill and industry having been enabled, in the decline of life, to purchase the farm which he had improved to such a pitch of beautiful cultivation. Her heart William Alison had won, and now she had been for some days betrothed to him as his bride. He now informed his parents, and his brothers and sisters, of this; and proud was he, and better than proud, when they all bade God bless her, and when his father and mother took her each by the hand, and kissed her, and wept over her in the fulness of their exceeding joy.

"We are to be married at midsummer; and, father and mother, before the winter sets in, there shall be a dwelling ready for you, not quite so roomy as our old house at the How, but a bonny bield for you, I hope, for many a year to come. It is not a quarter of a mile from our own house, and we shall not charge you a high rent for it, and the two-three fields about it. You shall be a farmer again, father, and no fear of ever being turned out again, be the lease short or long."

Fair Sally Mather joined her lover in this request, with her kindly smiling eyes; and what greater happiness could there be to such parents than to think of passing the remainder of their declining life near such a son, and such a pleasant being as their new daughter? "Abel and I," cried little Alice, unable to repress their joyful affection, "will live with you again—I will do all the work about the house that I am strong enough for, and Abel, you ken, is as busy as the unwearied bee, and will help my father about the fields, better and better every year. May we come home to you from service, Abel and I?"

"Are you not happy enough where you are?" asked the mother, with a loving voice.

"Happy or not happy," quoth Abel, "home we come at the term,

as sure as that is the cuckoo. Hearken how the dunce keeps repeating his own name, as if anybody did not know it already. Yonder he goes—with his titling at his tail. People talk of the cuckoo never being seen—why, I cannot open my eyes without seeing either him or his wife. Well, as I was saying—father—home Alice and I come at the term. Pray, what wages?"

But what brought the young Laird of Southfield here? thought the mother—while a dim and remote suspicion, too pleasant, too happy, to be true, passed across her maternal heart. Her sweet Agnes was a servant in his father's house; and though that father was a laird, and lived on his own land, yet he was in the very same condition of life as her husband, Abel Alison—they had often sat at each other's table—and her bonny daughter was come of an honest kind, and would not disgrace any husband either in his own house, or a neighbour's, or in his seat in the kirk. Such passing thoughts were thickening in the mother's breast, and perhaps not wholly unknown also to the father's, when the young man, looking, towards Agnes, who could not lift up her eyes from the ground, said, "My father is willing and happy that I should marry the daughter of Abel Alison; for he wishes me no other wife than the virtuous daughter of an honest man. And I will be happy—if my Agnes makes as good a wife as her mother."

A perfect blessedness now filled the souls of Abel Alison and his wife. One year ago, and they were, what is called, utterly ruined—they put their trust in God—and now they received their reward. But their pious and humble hearts did not feel it to be a reward; for in themselves they were conscious of no desert. The joy came from Heaven, undeserved by them, and with silent thanksgiving and adoration did they receive it, like dew into their opening spirits.

"Rise up, Alice, and let us have a dance;" and with these words little Abel caught his unreluctant sister round the waist, and whirled her off into the open green, as smooth as a floor. The young gardener took from his pocket a German flute, and began warbling away, with much flourishing execution, the gay lively air of "Ower the water to Charlie;" and the happy children, who had been one winter at the dancing-school, and had often danced by themselves on the fairy-rings on the hill-side, glided through the gloaming in all the mazes of a voluntary and extemporaneous duet. And then, descending suddenly and beautifully from the very height of glee into a composed gladness, left off the dance in a moment, and again seated themselves in the applauding circle.

"I have dropped my library out of my pocket," said Abel, springing up again—"yonder it is lying on the green. The last touch of the Highland Fling jerked it out. Here it is—bonny Robbie Burns—"The Twa Dogs"—"The Vision"—"The Cottar's Saturday Night"—and many, many a gay sang—and some sad anes, which I leave to Alice there, and other bits o' tender-hearted lasses—but fun and frolic for my money."

"I would not give my copy o' Allan Ramsay," replied Alice,

"for a stall-fu' of Burns's—at least gin "The Saturday Night" was clipped out. When did he ever make sic a poem as "The Gentle Shepherd"? Tell me that, Abel? Dear me, but isna this sweet quiet place, and the linn there, and the trees, and this green plat, just as bonny as Habbie's How? Mightna a bonny poem be made just about ourselves a' sitting here sae happy—and my brother going to marry bonny Sally Mather, and my sister the young Laird o' Southfield? I'se warrant, if Allan Ramsay had been alive, and one of the party, he would have put us a' into a poem—and aiblins called it the Family Tryst." "I will do that myself," said Abel—"I am a dab at verse. I made some capital ones just yesterday afternoon—I wrote them down on my sclate, below the sum total; but some crumbs had fallen out o' my pouch on the sclate, and Luath, licking them up, licked out a' my fine poems. I could greet to think o't."

But now the moon showed her dazzling crescent right over their heads,—as if she had issued gleaming forth from the deep blue of that very spot of heaven in which she hung; and fainter or brighter, far and wide over the firmament, was seen the great host of stars. The Old Man reverently uncovered his head; and, looking up to the diffused brilliancy of the magnificent arch of heaven, he solemnly exclaimed, "'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth forth His handiwork.' Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. My children, let us kneel down and pray." They did so; and, on rising from that prayer, the mother, looking towards her husband, said, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."

BLIND ALLAN.

Allan Bruce and Fanny Raeburn were in no respect remarkable among the simple inhabitants of the village in which they were born. They both bore a fair reputation in the parish, and they were both beloved by their own friends and relations. He was sober, honest, active, and industrious—exemplary in the common duties of private life—possessed of the humble virtues becoming his humble condition, and unstained by any of those gross vices that sometimes deform the character of the poor. She was modest, good-tempered, contented, and religious—and much is contained in these four words. Beauty she was not thought to possess—nor did she attract attention; but whatever charm resides in pure health, innocence of heart, and simplicity of manners, that belonged to Fanny Raeburn; while there was nothing either about her face or figure to prevent her seeming even beautiful in the eyes of a lover.

These two humble and happy persons were betrothed in marriage.

Their affection had insensibly grown without any courtship, for they had lived daily in each other's sight; and undisturbed by jealousy or rivalry, by agitating hopes or depressing fears, their hearts had been tenderly united long before their troth was solemnly pledged; and they now looked forward with a calm and rational satisfaction to the happy years, which they humbly hoped might be stored up for them by a bountiful Providence. Their love was without romance, but it was warm, tender, and true; they were prepared by its strength to make any sacrifice for each other's sakes; and, had death taken away either of them before the wedding-day, the survivor might not perhaps have been clamorous in grief, or visited the grave of the departed with nightly lamentations, but not the less would that grief have been sincere, and not the less faithful would memory have been to all the images of the past.

Their marriage-day was fixed—and Allan Bruce had rented a small cottage, with a garden sloping down to the stream that cheered his native village. Thither, in about two months, he was to take his sweet and affectionate Fanny—she was to work with her needle as before—and he in the fields. No change was to take place in their lives, but a change from contentment to happiness; and if God prolonged to them the possession of health, and blessed them with children, they feared not to bring them decently up, and to afford sunshine and shelter to the living flowers that might come to gladden their house. Such thoughts visited the souls of the lovers—and they were becoming dearer and dearer to one another every hour that brought them closer to their marriage-day.

At this time Allan began to feel a slight dimness in his sight, of which he did not take much notice, attributing it to some indisposition brought on by the severity of his winter's work. For he had toiled late and early, during all weathers, and at every kind of labour, to gain a sum sufficient to furnish respectably his lowly dwelling, and also to array his sweet bride in wedding-clothes of which she should not need to be ashamed. The dimness, however, each succeeding day, darkened and deepened till even his Fanny's face was indistinctly discerned by him, and he lost altogether the smile which never failed to brighten it whenever he appeared. Then he became sad and dispirited, for the fear of blindness fell upon him, and he thought of his steps being led in his helplessness by the hand of a child. He prayed to God to avert this calamity from him—but if not, to bestow upon him the virtue of resignation. He thought of the different blind men whom he had known, and as far as he knew, they all seemed happy. That belief pacified his soul when it was about to give way to a passionate despair; and every morning at sunrise, when the fast advancing verdure of spring seemed more dim and glimmering before his eyes, he felt his soul more and more resigned to that final extinction of the day's blessed light, which he knew must be his doom before the earth was covered with the flowers and fragrance of June.

It was as he had feared; and Allan Bruce was now stone-blind. Fanny's voice had always been sweet to his ear, and now it was

sweeter still when heard in the darkness. Sweet had been the kisses which breathed from Fanny's lips, while his eyes delighted in their rosy freshness. But sweeter were they now when they touched his eyelids, and he felt upon his cheeks her fast-trickling tears. She visited him in his father's house, and led him with her gently guiding hands into the adjacent fields, and down along the stream which he said he liked to hear murmuring by; and then they talked together about themselves, and on their knees prayed to God to counsel them what to do in their distress.

These meetings were always happy meetings to them both, notwithstanding the many mournful thoughts with which they were necessarily attended; but to Allan Bruce they yielded a support that did not forsake him in his hours of uncompanioned darkness. His love, which had formerly been joyful in the warmth of youth, and in the near prospect of enjoyment, was now chastened by the sad sense of his unfortunate condition, and rendered thereby a deep and devout emotion which had its comfort in its own unwitnessed privacy and imperishable truth. The tones of his Fanny's voice were with him on his midnight bed, when his affliction was like to overcome his fortitude; and to know that he was still tenderly beloved by that gentle and innocent friend, was a thought that gave light to darkness, and suffered sleep to fall balmily on lids that shut up eyes already dark as in profoundest slumber. The meek fold of her pitying embrace was with him in the vague uncertainty of his dreams; and often he saw faces in his sleep beaming consolation upon him, that always assumed at last Fanny's features, and as they grew more distinct, brightened up into a perfect likeness of his own faithful and disinterested maiden. He lay down with her image, because it was in his evening prayers; and he rose up with her image, or it came gliding in upon him, as he knelt down at his bedside in the warm beams of the unseen morning light.

Allan and Fanny were children of poor parents; and when he became blind, they, and indeed all their friends and relations, set their faces against this marriage. This they did in kindness to them both, for prudence is one of the best virtues of the poor; and to indulge even the holiest affections of our nature, seems to them to be sinful, if an infliction from God's hand intimates that such union would lead to sorrow and distress. The same thoughts had taken possession of Allan's own soul; and loving Fanny Raeburn with a perfect affection, why should he wish her, in the bright and sunny days of her youthful prime, to become chained to a blind man's steps, kept in constant poverty and drudgery for his sake, and imprisoned in a lonesome hut, during the freedom of her age, and the joyfulness of nature ringing over the earth? "It has pleased God," said the blind man to himself, "that our marriage should not be. Let Fanny, if she chooses, some time or other marry another, and be happy." And, as the thought arose, he felt the bitterness of the cup, and wished that he might soon be in his grave.

For, while his eyes were not thus dark, he saw many things that

gave him pleasure besides his Fanny, well as he loved her; nor had his been an absorbing passion, although most sincere. He had often been happy at his work with his companions, in the amusements of his age and condition with the members of his own family, without thinking even of his dear Fanny Raeburn. She was not often, to be sure, entirely out of his thoughts; for the consciousness of loving her, and of being beloved, accompanied his steps, although he scarcely knew it, just as one who lives on a lake side, or by the murmur of a stream, may feel the brightness and the shadows of the one, and hear the constant music of the other, mingling as a remembrance or a dream with the impressions, thoughts, passions, and feelings of his ordinary human life. But now, what had been less pleasant or necessary to him all faded away, and he saw in his darkness one image only—Fanny Raeburn; he heard in his darkness one sound only—Fanny Raeburn's voice. Was she to smile in another man's house? Surely, that could not be; for her smiles were his, and to transfer them to another, seemed to him to be as impossible as for a mother to forget her own children, and pour with equal fondness her smiles upon the face of another who belonged not to her blood. Yet such transference, such forgetfulness, such sad change had been—that he well knew, even in the "short and simple annals of the poor," which alone he had read; and who would blame, who would pity, who would remember the case of the deserted and forsaken poor blind man?

Fanny Raeburn had always been a dutiful child, and she listened to the arguments of her parents with a heavy but composed heart. She was willing to obey them in all things in which it was her duty to obey—but here she knew not what was her duty. To give up Allan Bruce was a thought far worse to her than to give up life. It was to suffer her heartstrings to be hourly torn up by the roots. If the two were willing to be married, why should any one else interfere? If God had stricken Allan with blindness after their marriage, would any one have counselled her to leave him, or pitied her because she had to live with her own blind husband? Or would the fear of poverty have benumbed her feelings? or rather would it not have given new alacrity to her hands, and new courage to her heart? So she resolved, meekly and calmly, to tell Allan that she would be his wife, and that she believed that such was, in spite of this infliction, the will of God.

Allan Bruce did not absent himself, in his blindness, from the House of God. One Sabbath, after divine service, Fanny went up to him in the churchyard, and putting her arm in his, they walked away together, seemingly as cheerful as the rest of the congregation, only with somewhat slower and more cautious steps. They proceeded along the quiet meadow-fields by the banks of the stream, and then across the smooth green braes, till they gently descended into a holm, and sat down together in a little green bower, which a few hazels, mingling with one tall weeping birch, had of themselves framed; a place where they had often met before Allan was blind, and where they had first spoken of a wedded life. Fanny could

have almost wept to see the earth, and the sky, and the whole day, so beautiful, now that Allan's eyes were dark; but he whispered to her, that the smell of the budding trees, and of the primroses that he knew were near his feet, was pleasant indeed, and that the singing of all the little birds made his heart dance within him—so Fanny sat beside her blind lover in serene happiness, and felt strengthened in her conviction that it was her duty to become his wife.

"Allan—I love you so entirely, that to see you happy is all that I desire on earth. Till God made you blind, Allan, I knew not how my soul could be knit unto yours—I knew not the love that was in my heart. To sit by you with my work—to lead you out thus on pleasant Sabbaths—to take care that your feet do not stumble, and that nothing shall ever offer violence to your face—to suffer no solitude to surround you—but that you may know, in your darkness, that mine eyes, which God still permits to see, are always upon you—for these ends, Allan, will I marry thee, my beloved—thou must not say nay—for God would not forgive me if I became not thy wife." And Fanny fell upon his neck and wept.

There was something in the quiet tone of her voice—something in the meek fold of her embrace—something in the long weeping kiss that she kept breathing tenderly over his brow and eyes—that justified to the Blind Man his marriage with such a woman. "Let us be married, Fanny, on the day fixed before I lost my sight. Till now I knew not fully either your heart or my own—now I fear nothing. Would—my best friend—I could but see thy sweet face for one single moment now—but that can never be!"—"All things are possible to God; and although to human skill your case is hopeless—it is not utterly so to my heart; yet if ever it becomes so, Allan, then will I love thee better even than I do now, if indeed my heart can contain more affection than that with which it now overflows."

Allan Bruce and Fanny Raeburn were married. And although there was felt, by the most careless heart, to be something sad and solemn in such nuptials, yet Allan made his marriage-day one of sober cheerfulness in his native village. Fanny wore her white ribbons in the very way that used to be pleasant to Allan's eyes; and blind as he now was, these eyes kindled with a joyful smile when he turned the clear sightless orbs towards his bride, and saw her within his soul arrayed in the simple white dress which he heard all about him saying so well became her sweet looks. Her relations and his own partook of the marriage feast in their cottage—there was the sound of music and dancing feet on the little green plat at the foot of the garden, by the river's side—the bride's youngest sister, who was henceforth to be an inmate in the house, remained when the party went away in the quiet of the evening—and peace, contentment, and love, folded their wings together over that humble dwelling.

From that day Allan and his wife were perfectly happy—and they could not help wondering at their former fears. There was, at once, a general determination formed all over the parish to do them

every benefit. Fanny, who had always been distinguished for her skill and fancy as a seamstress, became now quite the fashionable dressmaker of the village, and had more employment offered than she could accept. So that her industry alone was more than sufficient for all their present wants. But Allan, though blind, was not idle. He immediately began to instruct himself in various departments of a blind man's work.—A loom was purchased; and in a few weeks he was heard singing to the sound of his fly-shuttle as merry as the bullfinch in the cage that hung at the low window of his room. He was not long in finding out the way of plaiting rush-rugs and wicker-baskets—the figures of all of which were soon, as it were, visible through his very fingers; and before six months were over, Allan Bruce and his wife were said to be getting rich, and a warm blessing broke from every heart upon them, and their virtuous and unrepining industry.

Allan had always been fond of music, and his voice was the finest tenor in all the kirk. So he began in the evenings of winter to teach a school for sacred music—and thus every hour was turned to account. Allan repined not now—nay, at times he felt as if his blindness were a blessing; for it forced him to trust to his own soul—to turn for comfort to the best and purest human affections—and to see God always.

Whatever misgivings of mind Allan Bruce might have experienced—whatever faintings and sickenings and deadly swoons of despair might have overcome his heart—it was not long before he was a freedman from all their slavery. He was not immured, like many as worthy as he, in an Asylum; he was not an encumbrance upon a poor father, sitting idle and in the way of others, beside an ill-fed fire and a scanty board; he was not forced to pace step by step along the lamp-lighted streets and squares of a city, forcing out beautiful music to gain a few pieces of coin from passers-by, entranced for a moment by sweet sounds plaintive or jocund; he was not a boy-led beggar along the highway, under the sickening sunshine or the chilling sleet, with an abject hat abjectly protruded with a cold heart for colder charity;—but he was, although he humbly felt and acknowledged that he was in nothing more worthy than these, a man loaded with many blessings, warmed by a constant ingle, laughed round by a flock of joyful children, love-tended and love-lighted by a wife who was to him at once music and radiance—while his house stood in the middle of a village of which all the inhabitants were his friends, and of all whose hands the knock was known when it touched his door, and of all whose voices the tone was felt when it kindly accosted him in the wood, in the field, in the garden, by the river's side, by the hospitable board of a neighbour, or in the churchyard assemblage before entering into the House of God.

Thus did years pass along. Children were born to them—lived—were healthy—and well-behaved. A blessing rested upon them and all that belonged to them; and the name of "blind Allan" carried with it far and near an authority that could belong only to virtue, piety, and faith tried by affliction, and found to stand fast.

Ten years ago, when they married, Allan Bruce and Fanny Raeburn were among the poorest of the poor; and, had it pleased God to send sickness among them, hard had been their lot. But now they lived in a better house—with a larger garden—and a few fields, with two cows of their own. Allan had workmen under him, a basket-maker now on a considerable scale—and his wife had her apprentices, too, the best dressmaker in the country round. They were rich. Their children were at school—and all things, belonging both to outer and inner life, had prospered to their hearts' desire. Allan could walk about many familiar places unattended; but that seldom happened, for while his children were at school he was engaged in his business; and when they came home, there was always a loving contest among them who should be allowed to take hold of their father's hand when he went out on his evening walk. Well did he know the tread of each loving creature's footstep—their very breath when their voices were silent. One touch of a head as it danced past him, or remained motionless by his side—one pressure of an arm upon his knee—one laugh from a corner, was enough to tell him which of his children was there; and in their most confused noise and merriment, his ear would have known if one romping imp had been away. So perfectly accustomed had he long been to his situation, that it might almost be said that he was unconscious of being blind, or that he had forgotten that his eyes once saw. Long had Allan Bruce indeed been the happiest of the blind.

It chanced at this time, that among a party who were visiting his straw-manufactory, there was a surgeon celebrated for his skill in operations upon the eye, who expressed an opinion that Allan's sight might be at least partially restored, and offered not only to perform the operation, but, if Allan would reside for some weeks in Edinburgh, to see him every day till it was known whether his case was or was not a hopeless one. Allan's circumstances were now such as to make a few weeks', or even months' confinement, of no importance to him; and though he said to his wife that he was averse to submit to an operation that might disturb the long-formed quiet and contentment of his mind by hopes never to be realised, yet those hopes of once more seeing Heaven's dear light gradually removed all his repugnance. His eyes were couched, and when the bandages were removed, and the soft broken light let in upon him, Allan Bruce was no longer among the number of the blind.

There was no uncontrollable burst of joy in the soul of Allan Bruce, when once more a communication was opened between it and the visible world. For he had learned lessons of humility and temperance in all his emotions during ten years of blindness, in which the hope of light was too faint to deserve the name. He was almost afraid to believe that his sight was restored. Grateful to him was its first uncertain and wavering glimmer, as a draught of water to a wretch in a crowded dungeon. But he knew not whether it was to ripen into the perfect day, or gradually to fade back again into the depth of his former darkness.

But when his Fanny—she on whom he had so loved to look when

she was a maiden in her teens—and who would not forsake him in the first misery of that great affliction, but had been overjoyed to link the sweet freedom of her prime to one sitting in perpetual dark—when she, now a staid and lovely matron, stood before him with a face pale in bliss, and all drenched in the flood-like tears of an unsupportable happiness—then truly did he feel what a heaven it was to see! And as he took her to his heart, he gently bent back her head, that he might devour with his eyes that benign beauty which had for so many years smiled upon him unbeheld, and which, now that he had seen once more, he felt that he could even at that very moment die in peace.

In came with soft steps, one after another, his five loving children, that for the first time they might be seen by their father. The girls advanced timidly, with blushing cheeks and bright shining hair, while the boys went boldly up to his side, and the eldest, looking in his face, exclaimed with a shout of joy,—"Our father sees!—our father sees!"—and then, checking his rapture, burst into tears. Many a vision had Allan Bruce framed to himself of the face and figure of one and all of his children. One, he had been told, was like himself—another, the image of its mother; and Lucy, he understood, was a blended likeness of them both. But now he looked upon them with the confused and bewildered joy of parental love, seeking to know and distinguish in the light the separate objects towards whom it yearned; and not till they spoke did he know their Christian names. But soon, soon, did the sweet faces of all his children seem, to his eyes, to answer well, each in its different loveliness, to the expression of the voices so long familiar to his heart.

Pleasant too, no doubt, was that expansion of heart that followed the sight of so many old friends and acquaintances, all of whom, familiar as he had long been with them in his darkness, one day's light now seemed to bring further forward in his affection. They came towards him now with brighter satisfaction; and the happiness of his own soul gave a kinder expression to their demeanour, and represented them all as a host of human beings rejoicing in the joy of one single brother. Here was a young man, who, when he saw him last, was a little schoolboy—here a man beginning to be bent with toil, and with a thoughtful aspect, who had been one of his own joyous and laughing fellow-labourers in field or at fair—here a man on whom, ten years before, he had shut his eyes in advanced but vigorous life, now sitting with a white head, and supported on a staff—all this change he knew before, but now he saw it; and there was thus a somewhat sad, but an interesting, delightful, and impressive contrast and resemblance between the past and the present, brought immediately before him by the removal of a veil. Every face around him—every figure—was instructive as well as pleasant; and, humble as his sphere of life was, and limited its range, quite enough of chance and change was now submitted to his meditation, to give his character, which had long been thoughtful, a still more solemn cast, and a temper of still more homely and humble wisdom.

Nor did all the addition to his happiness come from human life. Once more he saw the heavens and the earth. By men in his lowly condition, nature is not looked on very often perhaps with poetical eyes. But all the objects of nature are in themselves necessarily agreeable and delightful; and the very colours and forms he now saw filled his soul with bliss. Not for ten dark years had he seen a cloud, and now they were piled up like castles in the summer heaven. Not for ten dark years had he seen the vaulted sky, and there it was now bending majestically in its dark, deep, serene azure, full of tenderness, beauty, and power. The green earth, with all its flowers, was now visible beneath his feet. A hundred gardens blossomed—a hundred hedgerows ran across the meadow and up the sides of the hills—the dark grove of sycamore, shading the village church on its mount, stood tinged with a glitter of yellow light—and from one extremity of the village to the other, calm, fair and unwavering, the smoke from all its chimneys went up to heaven on the dewy morning air. He felt all this just by opening his eyelids. And, in his gratitude to God, he blessed the thatch of his own humble house, and the swallows that were twittering beneath its eaves.

Such, perhaps, were some of the feelings which Allan Bruce experienced on being restored to sight. But faint and imperfect must be every picture of man's inner soul. This, however, is true, that Allan Bruce now felt that his blindness had been to him, in many respects, a blessing. It had touched all hearts with kindness towards him and his wife when they were poor—it had kept his feet within the doors of his house, or within the gate of his garden, often when they might otherwise have wandered into less happy and innocent places—it turned to him the sole undivided love of his sweet contented Fanny—it gave to the filial tenderness of his children something of fondest passion—and it taught him moderation in all things, humility, reverence, and perfect resignation to the Divine Will. It may therefore be truly said, that when the blameless man once more lifted up his seeing eyes, in all things he beheld God.

Soon after this time, a small Nursery-garden between Roslin and Lasswade—a bank sloping down gently to the Esk—was on sale, and Allan Bruce was able to purchase it. Such an employment seemed peculiarly fitted for him, and also compatible with his other profession. He had acquired, during his blindness, much useful information from the readings of his wife or children; and, having been a gardener in his youth, among his many other avocations he had especially extended his knowledge respecting flowers, shrubs, and trees. Here he follows that healthy, pleasant, and intelligent occupation. Among his other assistant gardeners there is one man with a head white as snow, but a ruddy and cheerful countenance, who, from his self-importance, seems to be the proprietor of the garden. This is Allan's father, who lives in a small cottage adjoining—takes care of all the gardening tools—and is master of the beehives. His old mother, too, is sometimes seen weeding; but oftener

with her grandchildren, when in the evenings, after school, they are playing on the green plat by the sundial, with flowers garlanded round their heads, or feeding the large trout in the clear silvery well near the roots of the celebrated Pear-tree.

LILIAS GRIEVE.

There was fear and melancholy in all the glens and valleys that lay stretching around, or down upon St Mary's Loch, for it was the time of religious persecution. Many a sweet cottage stood untenanted on the hill-side and in the hollow; some had felt the fire, and been consumed, and violent hands had torn off the turf-roof from the green shieling of the shepherd. In the wide and deep silence and solitariness of the mountains it seemed as if human life were nearly extinct. Caverns and clefts, in which the fox had kenneled, were now the shelter of Christian souls—and when a lonely figure crept stealingly from one hiding-place to another, on a visit of love to some hunted brother in faith, the crows would hover over him, and the hawk shriek at human steps, now rare in the desert. When the babe was born there might be none near to baptize it, or the minister, driven from his kirk, perhaps poured the sacramental water upon its face from some pool in the glen whose rocks guarded the persecuted family from the oppressor. Bridals now were unfrequent, and in the solemn sadness of love many died before their time, of minds sunken and of broken hearts. White hair was on heads long before they were old; and the silver locks of ancient men were often ruefully soiled in the dust, and stained with their martyred blood.

But this is the dark side of the picture, for even in their caves were these people happy. Their children were with them, even like the wildflowers that blossomed all about the entrances of their dens. And when the voice of Psalms rose up from the profound silence of the solitary place of rocks, the ear of God was open, and they knew that their prayers and praises were heard in Heaven. If a child was born, it belonged unto the faithful; if an old man died, it was in the religion of his forefathers. The hidden powers of their souls were brought forth into the light, and they knew the strength that was in them for these days of trial. The thoughtless became sedate—the wild were tamed—the unfeeling made compassionate—hard hearts were softened, and the wicked saw the error of their ways. All deep passion purifies and strengthens the soul, and so was it now. Now was shown and put to the proof, the stern, austere, impenetrable strength of men, that would neither bend nor break—the calm, serene determination of matrons, who, with meek eyes and unblanched cheeks, met the scowl of the murderer—the silent beauty of maidens, who with smiles received their death—and the mysterious courage of children, who, in the inspiration of innocence and

spotless nature, kneeled down among the dewdrops on the green-sward, and died fearlessly by their parents' sides. Arrested were they at their work, or in their play, and with no other bandage over their eyes, but haply some clustering ringlet of their sunny hair, did many a sweet creature of twelve summers ask just to be allowed to say her prayers, and then go unappalled from her cottage-door to the breast of her Redeemer.

In those days had old Samuel Grieve and his spouse suffered sorely for their faith. But they left not their own house, willing to die there, or to be slaughtered, whenever God should so appoint. They were now childless; but a little granddaughter, about ten years old, lived with them, and she was an orphan. The thought of death was so familiar to her, that, although sometimes it gave a slight quaking throb to her heart in its glee, yet it scarcely impaired the natural joyfulness of her girlhood; and often, unconsciously, after the gravest or the saddest talk with her old parents, would she glide off with a lightsome step, a blithe face, and a voice sweetly humming some cheerful tune. The old people looked often upon her in her happiness, till their dim eyes filled with tears; while the grandmother said, "If this nest were to be destroyed at last, and our heads in the mould, who would feed this young bird in the wild, and where would she find shelter in which to fauld her bonny wings?"

Lilias Grieve was the shepherdess of a small flock, among the green pasturage at the head of St Mary's Loch, and up the hill-side, and over into some of the little neighbouring glens. Sometimes she sat in that beautiful churchyard, with her sheep lying scattered around her upon the quiet graves, where, on still sunny days, she could see their shadows in the water of the Loch, and herself sitting close to the low walls of the house of God. She had no one to speak to, but her Bible to read; and day after day the rising sun beheld her in growing beauty, and innocence that could not fade, happy and silent as a fairy upon the knowe, with the blue heavens over her head, and the blue lake smiling at her feet.

"My Fairy," was the name she bore by the cottage fire, where the old people were gladdened by her glee, and turned away from all melancholy thoughts. And it was a name that suited sweet Lilias well; for she was clothed in a garb of green, and often, in her joy, the green graceful plants that grow among the hills were wreathed round her hair. So was she dressed one Sabbath-day, watching her flock at a considerable distance from home, and singing to herself a Psalm in the solitary moor—when in a moment a party of soldiers were upon a mount on the opposite side of a narrow dell. Lilias was invisible as a green linnet upon the grass, but her sweet voice betrayed her, and then one of the soldiers caught the wild gleam of her eyes, and, as she sprang frightened to her feet, he called out, "A roe—a roe—see how she bounds along the bent!" and the ruffian took aim at the child with his musket, half in sport, half in ferocity. Lilias kept appearing and disappearing, while she flew as on wings across a piece of black heathery moss full of pits and hollows—and still the soldier kept his musket at his aim. His com-

rades called to him to hold his hand, and not shoot a poor little innocent child; but he at length fired, and the bullet was heard to whizz past her fern-crowned head, and to strike a bank which she was about to ascend. The child paused for a moment, and looked back, and then bounded away over the smooth turf; till, like a cushat, she dropped into a little birchen glen and disappeared. Not a sound of her feet was heard—she seemed to have sunk into the ground—and the soldier stood, without any effort to follow her, gazing through the smoke towards the spot where she had vanished.

A sudden superstition assailed the hearts of the party, as they sat down together upon a ledge of stone. "Saw you her face, Riddle, as my ball went whizzing past her ear?—curse me if she be not one of those hill fairies, else she had been dead as a herring—but I believe the bullet glanced off her yellow hair as against a buckler."

"By St George, it was the act of a gallows-rogue to fire upon the creature, fairy or not fairy, and you deserve the weight of this hand, the hand of an Englishman, you brute, for your cruelty"—and up rose the speaker to put his threat into execution, when the other retreated some distance, and began to load his musket; but the Englishman ran upon him, and, with a Cumberland gripe and trip, laid him upon the hard ground with a force that drove the breath out of his body, and left him stunned and almost insensible.

"That serves him right, Allan Sleigh—shiver my timbers if I would fire upon a petticoat. As to fairies, why, look ye, 'tis a likely place enow for such creatures—if this be one, it is the first I ever saw; but as to your mermaids, I have seen a score of them, at different times when I was at sea. As to shooting at them—no, no—we never tried that, or the ship would have gone to the bottom. There have I seen them sitting on a rock, with a looking-glass, combing their hair, that wrapped round them like a net, and then down into a coral cave in a jiffey to their mermans—for mermaid, fairy, or mere flesh-and-blood woman, they are all the same in that respect—take my word for it."

The fallen ruffian now rose somewhat humbled, and sullenly sat down among the rest. "Why," quoth Allan Sleigh, "I wager you a week's pay you don't venture fifty yards, without your musket, down yonder shingle where the fairy disappeared;"—and the wager being accepted, the half-drunken fellow rushed on towards the head of the glen, and was heard crashing away through the shrubs. In a few minutes he returned—declaring with an oath that he had seen her at the mouth of a cave where no human foot could reach, standing with her hair all on fire, and an angry countenance, and that he had tumbled backwards into the burn and been nearly drowned.

"Drowned!" cried Allan Sleigh.

"Ay, drowned—why not? a hundred yards down that bit glen the pools are as black as pitch and as deep as hell, and the waters roar like thunder—drowned!—why not, you English son of a deer-stealer?"

"Why not? because who was ever drowned that was born to be hanged?" And that jest caused universal laughter—as it is

always sure to do, often as it may be repeated, in a company of ruffians, such is felt to be its perfect truth and unanswerable simplicity.

After an hour's quarrelling, and gibing, and mutiny, this disorderly band of soldiers proceeded on their way down into the head of Yarrow, and there saw in the solitude the house of Samuel Grieve. Thither they proceeded to get some refreshment, and ripe for any outrage that the occasion might suggest. The old man and his wife, hearing a tumult of many voices and many feet, came out, and were immediately saluted with many opprobrious epithets. The hut was soon rifled of any small articles of wearing apparel, and Samuel, without emotion, set before them whatever provisions he had, butter, cheese, bread, and milk—and hoped they would not be too hard upon old people, who were desirous of dying, as they had lived, in peace. Thankful were they both in their parental hearts that their little Lilias was among the hills; and the old man trusted, that if she returned before the soldiers were gone, she would see from some distance their muskets on the green before the door, and hide herself among the brackens.

The soldiers devoured their repast with many oaths, and much hideous and obscene language, which it was sore against the old man's soul to hear in his own hut; but he said nothing, for that would have been wilfully to sacrifice his life. At last one of the party ordered him to return thanks in words impious and full of blasphemy, which Samuel calmly refused to do, beseeching them, at the same time, for the sake of their own souls, not so to offend their great and bountiful Preserver. "Confound the old canting Covenanter, I will prick him with my bayonet if he won't say grace!" and the blood trickled down the old man's cheek, from a slight wound on his forehead. The sight of it seemed to awaken the dormant blood-thirstiness in the tiger-heart of the soldier, who now swore, if the old man did not instantly repeat the words after him, he would shoot him dead. And, as if cruelty were contagious, almost the whole party agreed that the demand was but reasonable, and that the old hypocritical knave must preach or perish. "Damn him!" cried one of them, in a fury, "here is the Word of God, a great musty Bible, stinking of greasy black leather, worse than a whole tanyard. If he won't speak, I will gag him with a vengeance. Here, old Mr Peden the prophet, let me cram a few chapters of St Luke down your maw. St Luke was a physician, I believe. Well, here is a dose of him. Open your jaws." And with these words he tore a handful of leaves out of the Bible, and advanced towards the old man, from whose face his terrified wife was now wiping off the blood.

Samuel Grieve was nearly fourscore; but his sinews were not yet relaxed, and in his younger days he had been a man of great strength. When, therefore, the soldier grasped him by the neck, the sense of receiving an indignity from such a slave made his blood boil, and, as if his youth had been renewed, the grey-headed man, with one blow, felled the ruffian to the floor.

That blow sealed his doom. There was a fierce tumult and yelling of wrathful voices, and Samuel Grieve was led out to die. He had witnessed such butchery of others, and felt that the hour of his martyrdom was come. "As thou didst reprove Simon Peter in the garden, when he smote the High Priest's servant, and saidst, 'The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?'—so now, O my Redeemer, do thou pardon me, thy frail and erring follower, and enable me to drink this cup!" With these words the old man knelt down unbidden; and, after one solemn look to heaven, closed his eyes, and folded his hands across his breast.

His wife now came forward, and knelt down beside the old man. "Let us die together, Samuel; but oh! what will become of our dear Lilias?"—"God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," said her husband, opening not his eyes, but taking her hand into his. "Sarah, be not afraid."—"Oh! Samuel, I remember, at this moment, these words of Jesus which you this morning read—'Forgive them, Father, they know not what they do!'"—"We are all sinners together," said Samuel, with a loud voice—"we two old grey-headed people on our knees, and about to die, both forgive you all as we hope ourselves to be forgiven. We are ready—be merciful, and do not mangle us. Sarah, be not afraid."

It seemed that an angel was sent down from Heaven to save the lives of these two old grey-headed folk. With hair floating in sunny light, and seemingly wreathed with flowers of heavenly azure, with eyes beaming lustre and yet streaming tears, with white arms extended in their beauty, and motion gentle and gliding as the sunshine when a cloud is rolled away, came on over the meadow before the hut the same green-robed creature that had startled the soldiers with her singing in the moor, and crying loudly, but still sweetly, "God sent me hither to save their lives." She fell down beside them as they knelt together; and then, lifting up her head from the turf, fixed her beautiful face, instinct with fear, love, hope, and the spirit of prayer, upon the eyes of the men about to shed that innocent blood.

They all stood heart-stricken; and the executioners flung down their muskets upon the greensward. "God bless you, kind good soldiers for this!" exclaimed the child, now weeping and sobbing with joy. "Ay—ay—you will be all happy to-night, when you lie down to sleep. If you have any little daughters or sisters like me, God will love them for your mercy to us, and nothing, till you return home, will hurt a hair of their heads. Oh! I see now that soldiers are not so cruel as we say!"—"Lilias, your grandfather speaks unto you;—his last words are—leave us—leave us—for they are going to put us to death. Soldiers, kill not this little child, or the waters of the Loch will rise up and drown the sons of perdition. Lilias, give us each a kiss—and then go into the house."

The soldiers conversed together for a few minutes, and seemed now like men themselves condemned to die. Shame and remorse for their coward cruelty smote them to the core—and they bade them that were still kneeling to rise up and go their ways—then

forming themselves into regular order, one gave the word of command, and, marching off, they soon disappeared. The Old Man, his Wife, and little Lilias, continued for some time on their knees in prayer, and then they all three went into their hut—the child between them—and a withered hand of each laid upon its beautiful and its fearless head.

THE COVENANTER'S MARRIAGE-DAY.

THE Marriage Party were to meet in a little lonesome dell, well known to all the dwellers round St Mary's Loch. A range of bright green hills goes southward from its shores, and between them and the high heathery mountains lies a shapeless scene of cliffs, moss, and pasture, partaking both of the beauty and the grandeur between which it so wildly lies. All these cliffs are covered with native birch-trees, except a few of the loftiest that shoot up their bare points in many fantastic forms: that moss, full of what the shepherds called "hags," or hollows worn by the weather, or dug out for fuel, waves, when the wind goes by, its high rich-blossomed and fragrant heath; and that pasturage, here and there in circular spots of emerald verdure, affords the sweetest sustenance to the sheep to be found among all that mountainous region. It was in one of these circles of beautiful herbage, called by the shepherds "The Queen-Fairy's Parlour," that Mark Kerr and Christian Lindsay, who had been long betrothed, were now to be made man and wife. It was nearly surrounded by large masses, or ledges of loose rocks, piled to a considerable height upon each other by some strong convulsion, and all adorned with the budding and sweet-breathing birches, while the circle was completed by one overshadowing cliff that sheltered it from the north blast, and on whose airy summit the young hawks were shrilly and wildly crying in their nest.

The bridegroom was sitting there with his bride, and her bridesmaid; and by-and-by, one friend after another appeared below the natural arch that, all dropping with wildflowers, formed the only entrance into this lonely Tabernacle. At last they all stood up in a circle together—shepherds decently apparelled, shepherdesses all dressed in raiment bleached whiter than the snow in the waters of the mountain spring, and the grey-headed Minister of God, who, driven from his kirk by blood-thirsty persecution, prayed and preached in the wilderness, baptised infants with the water of the running brook, and joined in wedlock the hands of those whose hearts longed to be united in those dark and deadly times. Few words were uttered by the gracious old man; but these few were solemn and full of cheer, impressed upon the hearts of the wedded pair by the tremulous tones of a voice that was not long for this world, by the sanctity of his long white locks unmoved by a breath

of air, and by the fatherly and apostolical motion of his uplifted hand, that seemed to conduct down upon them who stood in awe before him, the blessing of that God who delighteth in a humble heart. The short ceremony was now closed—and Mark Kerr and Christian Lindsay were united, till death should sunder them on earth to reunite them in heaven.

Greetings were interchanged—and smiles went round, with rosy blushes, and murmuring and whispering voices of irreproachable mirth. What though the days were dark, and the oppressor strong? Here was a place unknown to his feet; and now was a time to let the clear sparkling fountain of nature's joy well up in all hearts. Sadness and sorrow overshadowed the land, but human life was not yet wholly a waste; and the sweet sunshine that now fell down through a screen of fleecy clouds upon the Queen-Fairy's Parlour, was it not to enliven and rejoice all their souls? Was it not to make the fair bride fairer in her husband's eyes—her smile brighter, and the ringlets more yellow as they hung over a forehead that wore its silken snood no longer, but in its changed covering gracefully showed that Christian Lindsay was now a wife? The tabor and the pipe were heard; and footsteps, that left no print on the hard smooth verdant floor, kept time to the merry measures. Perhaps the old man would have frowned on such pastime—perhaps Covenanters ought not to have indulged in promiscuous dancing—perhaps it may be said to be false that they did so;—but the Minister had gone now to his own hiding-place. These Covenanters were young, and this occasion was a happy one; and dance they did, most assuredly, wicked as it may have been, and improper as it may be to record such wickedness. The young hawks were not a little alarmed; and an old ram, who happened to put in his twisted horns below the arch, got a fright that made him bound backwards out of the enchanted circle. The hill blackbird wondered: but he himself joined the dance upon the birchen spray—and, although no great songster, he did his best, and chirped cheerfully his mellow notes in the din of the general happiness.

But as the evening hours were advancing, the party kept dropping away one by one, or in pairs, just as it had gathered; and the Fairy-Queen had her Parlour all to herself undisturbed, if she chose at night to hold a court beneath the lamp of the moon.

Where had the young married pair their bridal chamber? Mark Kerr had a shieling on the mountain-side, from which was just visible one bay of St Mary's Loch. The walls were built of turf, and the roof of heather—and, surrounded as it was on all sides by large stones, wooded cliffs, knowes, and uneven eminences, it was almost as likely to escape notice as the nest of a bird, or the lair of a roe. Thither he took his bride. Her little bridesmaid had a small covert of her own, distant only a few roods, and the friends could see each other standing at the door of each shieling, through the intercepting foliage of the waving birches that hung down their thin and ineffectual veil till it swept the blooming heather.

On a small seat, framed of the roots of decayed trees, Mark Kerr

was now sitting with his own sweet Christian; when he gently raised her head from his bosom, and told her to go into the shieling, for he saw people on the hill-side, whose appearance, even at that distance, he did not like. Before a quarter of an hour had elapsed a party of soldiers were at hand. Mark knew that he had been observed for some time; and to attempt to escape with his bride was impossible. So he rose up at their approach, and met them with a steady countenance, although there were both fear and sorrow in his heart. Christian had obeyed him, and the shieling was silent.

"Is your name Mark Kerr?" "Yes—that is my name." "Were you at Yarrow-Ford when a prisoner was rescued and a soldier murdered?" "I was—but did all I could to save that soldier's life." "You wolf, you mangled his throat with your own bloody fangs—but we have traced you to your den, and the Ghost of Hugh Gemmel, who was as pleasant either with lad or lass as any boy that ever emptied a cup or had a fall upon heather, will shake hands with you by moonlight by-and-by. You may meet either in the churchyard, down by the Loch, where your canting Covenanters will bury you, or down at Yarrow-Kirk, where Hugh was put to bed with the worms, in his red coat, like a soldier as he was. By the Holy God of Israel—(is not that a lump of your own slang?)—this bayonet shall drink a stoup of your heart's blood!"

Mark Kerr knew, in a moment, that there was no hope of life. He had confessed being present on the occasion charged against him; and a sentence of death, which an angel's intercession could not have got reversed, was glaring in the eyes of all the soldiers. Each man seemed to kindle into fiercer fury as he caught the fiery eyes around him. Their oaths and execrations exasperated them all into frenzy; and a wild and perturbed sense of justice demanding expiation of their murdered comrade's blood, made them deaf and blind to everything but the suggestions of their own irritated and inflamed hearts. A horrid sympathy possessed them all; and they were as implacable as a herd of wolves famished and in sight of their prey. There was no mercy in any one face there, else Mark Kerr would have appealed to that man, for his life was now sweet and precious, and it was a hard thing to die. "I know his face. He is the very man that stabbed Hugh when he was down with his own bayonet. How do you like that, sirrah?"—and one of the soldiers thrust his long bayonet through Mark's shoulder till the point was seen at his back, and then drew it out smeared with blood, and returned it to its sheath with a grin of half-glutted vengeance. The wounded man staggered at the blow and sat down, nearly fainting, upon the seat where a few minutes before his bride had leant her head upon his bosom. But he uttered not a word, and kept his eyes fixed, not reproachfully, but somewhat sadly and with a faint expression of hope, on the men who seemed determined to be his executioners. The pain, the sickness, the sudden blasting of all his hopes, almost unmanned his resolute heart; and Mark Kerr would have now done much to save his life—and something, perhaps, even at the expense of conscience and faith. But that weak mood was of short duration

—and the good and brave man braced up his heart to receive the doom of death.

Meanwhile one of the soldiers had entered the shieling, and brought out Christian in his grasp. A loud shout of laughter and scornful exultation followed. "Ho, ho—my heath-cock, you have got your bonny hen!—Catch a Covenanter without his comfort!—Is your name Grace, my bonny bairn?" Christian looked around, and saw Mark sitting pale and speechless, with his breast covered with clotted blood. She made no outcry, for grief, and pity, and consternation, struck her dumb. She could not move, for the soldier held her in his arms. But she looked in the ruffian's face with such an imploring countenance, that unconsciously he let her go, and then she went up tottering to poor Mark, and with her white bridal gown wiped off the gore from his breast, and kissed his clayey and quivering lips. She then ran to the spring that lay sparkling among its cresses, within a few yards of the shieling, and brought a handful of cold water, which she sprinkled tenderly over his face. The human soul is a wild and terrible thing when inflamed with cruelty and revenge. The soldiers saw little more in all this than a subject for loathsome scurrility and ferocious merriment; and as Christian looked wildly round upon them, one asked, "Are you his sister—his cousin—or his drab?" "Oh! soldiers—soldiers—I am his wife—this blessed day was I married to him. If any of you are married men, think of your wives now at home—remember the day they were brides, and do not murder us quite—if, indeed, my Mark is not already murdered." "Come, come, Mrs Sweetlips, no more whining—you shall not want a husband. I will marry you myself, and so I daresay will the sergeant there, and also the corporal. Now, you have had indulgence enough—so stand back a bit; and do you, good Master Paleface, come forward, and down upon your marrow-bones." Mark, with great difficulty, rose up, and knelt down as he was ordered.

He had no words to say to his bride; nor almost did he look at her—so full was his soul of her image, and of holy grief for the desolation in which she would be left by his death. The dewy breath of her gentle and pure kisses was yet in his heart; and the happy sighs of maidenly tenderness were now to be changed into groans of incurable despair. Therefore it was that he said nothing as he knelt down, but his pallid lips moved in prayer, and she heard her name indistinctly uttered between those of God and Christ.

Christian Lindsay had been betrothed to him for several years, and nothing but the fear of some terrible evil like this had kept them so long separate. Dreadful, therefore, as this hour was, their souls were not wholly unprepared for it, although there is always a miserable difference between reality and mere imagination. She now recalled to her mind, in one comprehensive thought, their years of innocent and youthful affection; and then the holy words so lately uttered by the Old Man in that retired place, alas! called by too vain a name, "The Queen-Fairy's Parlour!" The tears began now to flow—they both wept—for this night was Mark Kerr's head

to lie, not on her bosom, but in the grave, or unburied on the ground. In that agony, what signified to her all the insulting, hideous, and inhuman language of these licentious murderers? They fell off her soul without a stain, like polluted water off the plumage of some fair sea-bird. And as she looked on her husband upon his knees, awaiting his doom—him the temperate, the merciful, the gentle, and the just—and then upon those wrathful, raging, fiery-eyed, and bloody-minded men,—Are they, thought her fainting heart, of the same kind? are they framed by one God? and hath Christ alike died for them all?

She lifted up her eyes, full of prayers, for one moment to heaven, and then, with a cold shudder of desertion, turned them upon her husband, kneeling with a white fixed countenance, and half dead already with the loss of blood. A dreadful silence had succeeded to that tumult; and she dimly saw a number of men drawn up together without moving, and their determined eyes held fast upon their victim. "Think, my lads, that it is Hugh Gemmel's ghost that commands you now," said a deep hoarse voice—"no mercy did the holy men of the mountains show to him when they smashed his skull with large stones from the channel of the Yarrow. Now for revenge!"

The soldiers presented their muskets—the word was given—and they fired. At that moment Christian Lindsay had rushed forward and flung herself down on her knees beside her husband, and they both fell, and stretched themselves out mortally wounded upon the grass.

During all this scene, Marion Scott, the bridesmaid, a girl of fifteen, had been lying affrighted among the brackens, within a hundred yards of the murder. The agony of grief now got the better of the agony of fear, and, leaping up from her concealment, she rushed into the midst of the soldiers, and, kneeling down beside her dear Christian Lindsay, lifted up her head, and shaded the hair from her forehead. "Oh! Christian, your eyes are opening—do you hear me—do you hear me speaking?"

"Yes, I hear a voice—is it yours, Mark?—speak again."

"Oh! Christian, it is only my voice—poor Marion's."

"Is Mark dead—quite dead?" And there was no reply; but Christian must have heard the deep gasping sobs that were rending the child's heart. Her eyes, too, opened more widely, and, misty as they were, they saw, indeed, close by her, the huddled-up, mangled, and bloody body of her husband.

The soldiers stood like so many beasts of prey, who had gorged their fill of blood; their rage was abated, and they offered no violence to the affectionate child, as she continued to sit before them, with the head of Christian Lindsay in her lap, watering it with tears, and moaning, so as to touch, at last, some even of their hardened hearts. When blood is shed it soon begins to appear a frightful sight to the shedders—and the hand soon begins to tremble that has let out human life. Cruelty cannot sustain itself in presence of that rueful colour, and remorse sees it reddening into a

more ghastly hue. Some of the soldiers turned away in silence, or with a half-suppressed oath—others strayed off among the trees, and sat down together; and none would now have touched the head of pretty little Marion. The man whom they had shot deserved death—so they said to one another—and he had got it; but the woman's death was accidental, and they were not to blame because she had run upon their fire. So, before the smell and the smoke of the gunpowder had been carried away by the passing breeze from that place of murder, all were silent, and could hardly bear to look one another in the face. Their work had been lamentable indeed; for now they began to see that these murdered people were truly bridegroom and bride. She was lying there dressed with her modest white bridal garments and white ribbons, now streaked with many streams of blood from mortal wounds. So, too, was she who was supporting her head. It was plain that a bridal party had been this very day—and that their hands had prepared for a happy and affectionate newly wedded pair that bloody bed, and a sleep from which there was to be no awaking at the voice of morn. They stood looking appalled on the bodies, while, on the wildflowers around them, which the stain of blood had not yet reached, loudly and cheerfully were murmuring the mountain bees.

Christian Lindsay was not quite dead, and she at last lifted herself up a little way out of Marion's lap, and then, falling down with her arms over her husband's neck, uttered a few indistinct words of prayer, and expired.

Marion Scott had never seen death before, and it was now presented to her in its most ghastly and fearful shape. Every horror she had ever heard talked of in the hiding-places of her father and relations was now realised before her eyes, and, for anything she knew, it was now her turn to die. Had she dreamed in her sleep of such a trial, her soul would have died within her, and she would have convulsively shrieked aloud on her bed. But the pale, placid, happy-looking face of dead Christian Lindsay, whom she had loved as an elder sister, and who had always been so good to her from the time she was a little child, inspired her now with an utter fearlessness—and she could have knelt down to be shot by the soldiers without one quickened pulsation at her heart. But now the soldiers were willing to leave the bloody green, and their leader told Marion she might go her ways and bring her friends to take care of the dead bodies. No one, he said, would hurt her. And soon after, the party disappeared.

Marion remained for a while beside the dead. Their wounds bled not now. But she brought water from the little spring and washed them all decently, and left not a single stain upon either of their faces. She disturbed, as little as possible, the position in which they lay; nor removed Christian's arms from her husband's neck. She lifted one of the arms up for a moment to wipe away a spot of blood, but it fell down again of itself, and moved no more.

During all this time the setting sunlight was giving a deeper tinge to the purple heather, and, as Marion lifted up her eyes to

heaven, she saw in the golden west the last relics of the day. All the wild was silent—not a sound was there but that of the night-hawk. And the darkening stillness touched Marion's young soul with a trembling superstition, as she looked at the dead bodies, then up to the uncertain sky and over the glimmering shades of the solitary glen. The poor girl was half afraid of the deepening hush, and the gathering darkness. Yet the spirits of those she had so tenderly loved would not harm her; they had gone to heaven. Could she find heart to leave them thus lying together? Yes—there was nothing, she thought, to molest the dead. No raven inhabited this glen; nothing but the dews would touch them, till she went to the nearest hiding-place, and told her father or some other friends of the murder.

Before the moon had risen, the same party that on the morning had been present at their marriage, had assembled on the hill-side before the shieling where Mark Kerr and Christian Lindsay were now lifted up together on a heather couch, and lying cold and still as in the grave. The few maids and matrons who had been in that happy scene in the Queen-Fairy's Parlour had not yet laid aside their white dresses, and the little starry ribbon-knots, or bride's favours, were yet upon their breasts. The old Minister had come from his cave, and not for many years had he wept till now; but this was a case even for the tears of an old religious man of fourscore.

To watch by the dead all night, and to wait for some days till they could be coffined for burial, was not to be thought of in such times of peril. That would have been to sacrifice the living foolishly for the dead. The soldiers had gone, but they might, no doubt would, return and scatter the funeral. Therefore it was no sooner proposed than agreed to in the afflicted souls of them all, that the bridegroom and his bride should be buried even that very night in the clothes in which they had that morning been wedded. A bier was soon formed of the birch-tree boughs; and with their faces meekly looking up to heaven, now filled with moonlight, they were borne along in sobbing silence, up the hills and down along the glens, till the party stood together in the lone burial-ground at the head of St Mary's Loch. A grave was dug for them there, but that was not their own burial-place; for Mark Kerr's father and mother lay in the churchyard of Melrose, and the parents of Christian Lindsay slept in that of Bothwell, near the flow of the beautiful Clyde. The grave was half filled with heather, and gently were they let down together, even as they were found lying on the green before their shieling, into that mournful bed. The old man afterwards said a prayer—not over them, but with the living. Then sitting down on the graves and on the gravestones, they spoke of the virtues of the dead. They had, it is true, been cut off in their youthful prime; but many happy days and years had been theirs—their affection for each other had been a pleasant solace to them in toil, poverty, and persecution. This would have been a perplexing day to those who had not faith in God's perfect holiness and mercy. But all who

mourned now together were wholly resigned to His dispensations, and soon all eyes were dried. In solemn silence they all quitted the churchyard; and then the funeral party, which a few hours ago had been a marriage one, dissolved among the hills and glens and rocks, and left Mark Kerr and Christian Lindsay to everlasting rest.

THE BAPTISM.

It is a pleasant and impressive time, when at the close of divine service, in some small country church, there takes place the gentle stir and preparation for a Baptism. A sudden air of cheerfulness spreads over the whole congregation; the more solemn expression of all countenances fades away; and it is at once felt, that a rite is about to be performed, which, although of a sacred and awful kind, is yet connected with a thousand delightful associations of purity, beauty, and innocence. Then there is an eager bending of smiling faces over the humble galleries—an unconscious rising up in affectionate curiosity—and a slight murmuring sound, in which is no violation of the Sabbath sanctity of God's House, when in the middle passage of the church the party of women is seen, matrons and maids, who bear in their bosoms, or in their arms, the helpless beings about to be made members of the Christian Communion.

There sit, all dressed becomingly in white, the fond and happy baptismal group. The babies have been intrusted, for a precious hour, to the bosoms of young maidens, who tenderly fold them to their yearning hearts, and with endearments taught by nature are stilling, not always successfully, their plaintive cries. Then the proud and delighted girls rise up, one after the other, in sight of the whole congregation, and hold up the infants, arrayed in neat caps and long flowing linen, into their fathers' hands. For the poorest of the poor, if he has a heart at all, will have his infant well dressed on such a day, even although it should scant his meal for weeks to come, and force him to spare fuel to his winter fire.

And now the fathers were all standing below the pulpit, with grave and thoughtful faces. Each has tenderly taken his infant into his toil-hardened hands, and supports it in gentle and steadfast affection. They are all the children of poverty, and, if they live, are destined to a life of toil. But now poverty puts on its most pleasant aspect, for it is beheld standing before the altar of religion with contentment and faith. This is a time when the better and deeper nature of every man must rise up within him, and when he must feel, more especially, that he is a spiritual and immortal being making covenant with God. He is about to take upon himself a holy charge; to promise to look after his child's immortal soul; and to keep its little feet from the paths of evil, and in those of

innocence and peace. Such a thought elevates the lowest mind above itself, diffuses additional tenderness over the domestic relations, and makes them who hold up their infants to the baptismal font, better fathers, husbands, and sons, by the deeper insight which they then possess into their nature and their life.

The Minister consecrates the water—and, as it falls on his infant's face, the father feels the great oath in his soul. As the poor helpless creature is wailing in his arms, he thinks how needful indeed to human infancy is the love of Providence! And when, after delivering each his child into the arms of the smiling maiden from whom he had received it, he again takes his place for admonition and advice before the pulpit, his mind is well disposed to think on the perfect beauty of that religion of which the Divine Founder said, "Suffer little children to be brought unto me, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven!"

The rite of Baptism had not thus been performed for several months in the Kirk of Lanark. It was now the hottest time of persecution; and the inhabitants of that parish found other places in which to worship God and celebrate the ordinances of religion. It was now the Sabbath-day, and a small congregation of about a hundred souls had met for Divine service in a place of worship more magnificent than any temple that human hands had ever built to Deity. Here, too, were three children about to be baptised. The congregation had not assembled to the toll of the bell, but each heart knew the hour and observed it; for there are a hundred sun-dials among the hills, woods, moors, and fields, and the shepherd and the peasant see the hours passing by them in sunshine and shadow.

The church in which they were assembled was hewn, by God's hand, out of the eternal rocks. A river rolled its way through a mighty chasm of cliffs, several hundred feet high, of which the one side presented enormous masses, and the other corresponding recesses, as if the great stone girdle had been rent by a convulsion. The channel was overspread with prodigious fragments of rock or large loose stones, some of them smooth and bare, others containing soil and verdure in their rents and fissures, and here and there crowned with shrubs and trees. The eye could at once command a long stretching vista, seemingly closed and shut up at both extremities by the coalescing cliffs. This majestic reach of river contained pools, streams, rushing shelves, and waterfalls innumerable; and when the water was low, which it now was in the common drought, it was easy to walk up this scene, with the calm blue sky overhead, an utter and sublime solitude. On looking up, the soul was bowed down by the feeling of that prodigious height of unscalable and often overhanging cliff. Between the channel and the summit of the far-extended precipices were perpetually flying rooks and wood-pigeons, and now and then a hawk, filling the profound abyss with their wild cawing, deep murmur, or shrilly shriek. Sometimes a heron would stand erect and still on some little stone island, or rise up like a white cloud along the black walls of the chasm and disappear.

Winged creatures alone could inhabit this region. The fox and wild-cat chose more accessible haunts. Yet here came the persecuted Christians and worshipped God, whose hand hung over their heads those magnificent pillars and arches, scooped out those galleries from the solid rock, and laid at their feet the calm water in its transparent beauty, in which they could see themselves sitting in reflected groups, with their Bibles in their hands.

Here, upon a semicircular ledge of rocks, over a narrow chasm, of which the tiny stream played in a murmuring waterfall, and divided the congregation into two equal parts, sat about a hundred persons, all devoutly listening to their Minister, who stood before them on what might well be called a small natural pulpit of living stone. Up to it there led a short flight of steps, and over it waved the canopy of a tall graceful birch-tree. This pulpit stood in the middle of the channel, directly facing that congregation, and separated from them by the clear deep sparkling pool into which the scarce-heard water poured over the blackened rock. The water, as it left the pool, separated into two streams, and flowed on each side of that Altar, thus placing it in an island, whose large mossy stones were richly embowered under the golden blossoms and green tresses of the broom. Divine service was closed, and a row of maidens, all clothed in purest white, came gliding off from the congregation, and crossing the stream on some stepping-stones, arranged themselves at the foot of the pulpit, with the infants about to be baptised. The fathers of the infants, just as if they had been in their own Kirk, had been sitting there during worship, and now stood up before the Minister. The baptismal water, taken from the pellucid pool, was lying consecrated in a small hollow of one of the upright stones that formed one side or pillar of the pulpit, and the holy rite proceeded. Some of the younger ones in that semicircle kept gazing down into the pool, in which the whole scene was reflected, and now and then, in spite of the grave looks or admonishing whispers of their elders, letting a pebble fall into the water that they might judge of its depth from the length of time that elapsed before the clear air-bells lay sparkling on the agitated surface. The rite was over, and the religious services of the day closed by a Psalm. The mighty rocks hemmed in the holy sound, and sent it in a more compacted volume, clear, sweet, and strong, up to heaven. When the Psalm ceased, an echo, like a spirit's voice, was heard dying away high up among the magnificent architecture of the cliffs, and once more might be noticed in the silence the reviving voice of the waterfall.

Just then a large stone fell from the top of the cliff into the pool, a loud voice was heard, and a plaid hung over on the point of a shepherd's staff. Their watchful sentinel had descried danger, and this was his warning. Forthwith the congregation rose. There were paths dangerous to unpractised feet, along the ledges of the rocks, leading up to several caves and places of concealment. The more active and young assisted the elder—more especially the old Pastor, and the women with the infants: and many minutes had not elapsed, till not a living creature was visible in the channel of

the stream, but all of them hidden, or nearly so, in the clefts and caverns.

The shepherd who had given the alarm had lain down again in his plaid instantly on the greensward upon the summit of these precipices. A party of soldiers were immediately upon him, and demanded what signals he had been making, and to whom; when one of them, looking over the edge of the cliff, exclaimed, "See, see! Humphrey, we have caught the whole Tabernacle of the Lord in a net at last. There they are, praising God among the stones of the river Mouss. These are the Cartland Craigs. By my soul's salvation, a noble cathedral!" "Fling the lying sentinel over the cliffs. Here is a canting Covenanter for you, deceiving honest soldiers on the very Sabbath-day. Over with him, over with him—out of the gallery into the pit." But the shepherd had vanished like a shadow; and mixing with the tall green broom and bushes, was making his unseen way towards a wood. "Satan has saved his servant; but come, my lads—follow me—I know the way down into the bed of the stream—and the steps up to Wallace's cave. They are called the 'Kittle Nine Stanes.' The hunt's up.—We'll be all in at the death. Halloo—my boys—halloo!"

The soldiers dashed down a less precipitous part of the wooded banks, a little below the "Craigs," and hurried up the channel. But when they reached the altar where the old grey-haired Minister had been seen standing, and the rocks that had been covered with people, all was silent and solitary—not a creature to be seen.

"Here is a Bible dropped by some of them," cried a soldier, and with his foot spun it away into the pool.

"A bonnet—a bonnet!"—cried another;—"now for the pretty sanctified face that rolled its demure eyes below it."

But after a few jests and oaths the soldiers stood still, eyeing with a kind of mysterious dread the black and silent walls of the rock that hemmed them in, and hearing only the small voice of the stream that sent a profounder stillness through the heart of that majestic solitude. "Curse these cowardly Covenanters—what if they tumble down upon our heads pieces of rock from their hiding-places? Advance? Or retreat?"

There was no reply; for a slight fear was upon every man. Musket or bayonet could be of little use to men obliged to clamber up rocks, along slender paths, leading they knew not where; and they were aware that armed men, nowadays, worshipped God,—men of iron hearts, who feared not the glitter of the soldier's arms—neither barrel nor bayonet—men of long stride, firm step, and broad breast, who, on the open field, would have overthrown the marshalled line, and gone first and foremost if a city had to be taken by storm.

As the soldiers were standing together irresolute, a noise came upon their ears like distant thunder, but even more appalling; and a slight current of air, as if propelled by it, passed whispering along the sweetbriers and the broom, and the tresses of the birch-trees. It came deepening and rolling, and roaring on, and the very Cartland Craigs shook to their foundation as if in an earthquake. "The

Lord have mercy upon us!—what is this?" And down fell many of the miserable wretches on their knees, and some on their faces, upon the sharp-pointed rocks. Now, it was like the sound of many myriad chariots rolling on their iron axles down the stony channel of the torrent. The old grey-haired Minister issued from the mouth of Wallace's Cave, and said, with a loud voice, "The Lord God terrible reigneth!" A waterspout had burst up among the moorlands, and the river, in its power, was at hand. There it came—tumbling along into that long reach of cliffs, and in a moment filled it with one mass of waves. Huge agitated clouds of foam rode on the surface of a blood-red torrent. An army must have been swept off by that flood. The soldiers perished in a moment—but high up in the cliffs, above the sweep of destruction, were the Covenanters—men, women, and children, uttering prayers to God, unheard by themselves in that raging thunder.

SIMON GRAY.

No man's life seemed to promise a calmer course and a more serene close than that of the Reverend Simon Gray. He had for many years possessed the entire affection and respect of all the inhabitants of his parish. A few words from him calmed angry blood, settled quarrels, and allayed animosity. In his kirk, in his Manse, in his neighbour's house, in the field, and by the wayside, he was in good truth the minister of peace. In his own family his happiness was perfect. His wife was, in all things, after his own heart; and two sons and one daughter, just reaching man and woman's estate, had scarcely ever given their parents distress, and seemed destined for a life of respectability and happiness. But it is with the humble as with the high in this world; their possessions are equally insecure; and the same lesson may be learned from the life of the lowest peasant, as from that of the loftiest king. From the cottage and from the palace the same warning voice is heard to say, "Call no man happy till he dies."

Simon Gray's eldest son, a youth of distinguished talents, and even more tenderly beloved than admired by all who knew him, was drowned in a moorland loch in his father's parish, one warm summer evening, when his parents were sitting at no great distance, in a hollow among the hills. They heard his cries, but could do nothing to save him, when, rushing to the water's weedy and rushy edge, they saw him sinking in miserable entanglement among the long strong roots of the water-lilies. Of the shock their hearts and whole being then got, nothing need be said; but from that evening, well as they were both thought to support it, every one in the parish felt that they never were the same people as before, that their faces never wore such bright smiles, and that the Minister and his wife

often looked to each other, when in company, with tearful eyes, as if an accidental word or allusion had awakened in their hearts a remembrance too tender or too terrible. Michael would have been, had he lived, his father's successor; and some thought that the Manse never looked exactly like itself since that fatal event.

But this was the beginning of Simon's sorrows. His other son was a clerk in a commercial house in the neighbouring city, and in the unreserved confidence of his employers. Regularly every Saturday did he walk out to the Manse—stay over the Sabbath—and next morning before breakfast appear at his desk. But one dark and stormy winter evening, in the middle of the week, he unexpectedly entered his father's study, and flinging himself down upon his knees, declared that he was a ruined and lost man—that he had formed a guilty connection with a woman who had led him on to his destruction—and that he had embezzled his benefactor's money;—done worse—forged his name, and that, unless he could make his escape, he must expiate his crime on a scaffold.

Simon Gray lifted up his son from his knees, and folded him to his heart. "My poor wretched boy—thy life is in jeopardy! Oh, that I knew how to save my son! Stephen—Stephen—what would signify the breaking of my heart if thou wast but safe! Speak not—my sweet boy—of thy crimes, great as they are. I am thy father, and can now think but of thy death and thy life. Fly, Stephen, and take with thee thy father's blessing. Perhaps all thy money is gone—I will give thee enough to pursue thy journey—and so also may I be able to repay all thou hast embezzled. O! Stephen—Stephen—my beloved boy, who hast so often sat in thine innocence on my knees, and whom so often I have put to bed after thy prayers, has it indeed come to this?" And father and son knelt down together and prayed unto their God. It was a black stormy night, and Stephen went away without seeing his mother or sister. He went away—but he never returned. He made his escape to America, and died, in a few weeks after his arrival, of the yellow fever.

The miserable father knew not how to break the matter to his wife and daughter. They saw his affliction—and he told them he feared Stephen was a profligate. But next night the outer door opened loudly, and two officers of justice entered the Manse. Now, all concealment was at an end; and next day it was known, not only to the inmates of the Manse, but to all the inhabitants of the parish, that Stephen Gray was a criminal, and had fled to a foreign land.

Over the grave of the eldest son, his parents could shed tears of a resigned sadness; but for him who died untended beyond the sea, their grief was bitter and inconsolable. No one ever uttered Stephen's name, although there was not a house in all the parish where his cheerful laugh had not been welcome. Ill as he had behaved, dishonestly and vilely, affection for his memory was in every heart. But a grave look or a sigh was all in which any one could show this sorrow and sympathy now; and the Minister of

Seatoun understood the silence of his parishioners, for his dead son had been a felon—ay, Stephen, the gay, witty, fearless, and affectionate Stephen, had been a felon. He had written a letter to his father on his death-bed—a few words—but they were impressed for ever on his father's soul, and often did he repeat them in his sleep, as the tears forced their way through his closed eyelids, and drenched his heaving breast.

The terror struck into the heart of Stephen's sister by the sudden bursting in of the officers of justice into the Manse, in some degree affected her intellects; her memory from that night was impaired, and after her brother's death in America had been communicated to her, she frequently forgot it, and, weeping, implored to know if he had not lately written home. "He must be dead, or he would have written;" and she kept walking about the house, from one room to another, repeating these words with a wailing voice, and sorely wringing her hands. That could not last long—without any disease, she lay down on her bed, and never more rose. She was buried by the side of her brother Michael—and now Simon Gray was childless.

Misfortunes, it is said, come in clouds; and indeed one is not the forerunner merely, but the cause of another, till a single loss appears, on reflection, to have been the source of utter misery, ruin, and desolation. Each of these deaths took away a portion of Simon Gray's fortitude; but still, after a few months, he had carried over his whole awakened heart upon the survivor. Now there was no one left for a parent's love; and it was buried below the last slab that laid its weight on his family burial-place. To be sure, poor Stephen was not there—but he had his memorial too, beside his brother and sister, for his crimes had not divided him from one loving heart—and few but his parents' eyes looked on the stone that bore his name and the number of his years.

Under all these afflictions, Simon's wife seemed to bear herself up to the wonder of all who beheld her. She attended to everything about the house as before; none of her duties to the poor or rich among her parishioners were neglected; and but for her, it was said that her husband must have sunk under his sorrows. But little do we know of each other's hearts. Simon Gray was disconsolate—miserable—despairing; but his health did not suffer—and he was able to discharge his ordinary duties as before, after a short suspension. She who administered comfort to him, sometimes in vain, needed it more even than himself; for her grief preyed inwardly in the midst of that serene resignation, and struck in upon her very heart. Her strength decayed—she drew her breath with pain; and although no one, not even her medical attendants, feared immediate danger, yet one day she was found dead sitting in a bower in the garden, to which she had retired to avoid the noonday sun. Death had come gently into that bower, and touched her heart, perhaps in a slumber. Her head was reclining against the green leaves, and the Bible had not even fallen out of her hand.

The calamities that had befallen the Minister of Seatoun were as

great as heart or imagination can conceive. Yet such calamities have been borne by many human beings, who have so far recovered from their shock as afterwards to enjoy some satisfaction in their existence. Men have we all known, with cheerful countenances, and apparently placid minds, whose best enjoyments have been sorely cut down; and who at one time, no doubt, thought and felt that for them, never more could there be one glimpse of joy upon the earth. But necessity is to many afflicted spirits, although a stern, yet a sure comforter. The heart in its agonies of grief is rebellious, and strives to break asunder the fetters of its fate. But that mood cannot be sustained. It is irrational and impious, and the soul can find true rest only in resignation and submission. Then mingled motives to better and calmer thoughts arise.—Men see the wisdom and the virtue of a temperate sorrow—the folly and the wickedness of outrageous grief. They begin to wish to obey the laws that ought to regulate the feelings of mortal creatures. In obeying them there is consolation, and a lightening of the sore burden of their distress. Then come blessed thoughts of the reward of the righteous who have gone to God—remembrances of all their beauty, innocence or goodness, while they sojourned with us here;—and hope, faith, and belief that we shall yet meet them face to face, and be no more severed. Thus does time cure the wounds of the heart, just as it covers the grave with verdure and with flowers. We cannot, if we would, live without often sorrowing; but neither can we, if we would, sorrow always. God is kinder to us than we are to ourselves, and he lifts us up when, in blind passion, we would fain lie grovelling hopelessly in the dust.

So is it with many—perhaps with most men—but it is not so with all. It was not so with him of whom we now speak. The death of his children he bore with resignation, and thought of them in peace. But when his soul turned from them to their mother it was suddenly disquieted; and day after day, week after week, and month after month, was it drawn with a more sickening and disconsolate passion of grief to her grave. An overwhelming tenderness for ever drowned his soul—haunted was he for ever by her image, dressed as he had never seen her but as he knew she now was dressed—in a shroud. The silence of his room—of the whole house—of the garden—the glebe—and all the fields around, was insupportable: he prayed to forget her; and then, with a gush of tears, he prayed that he might never cease for one moment to think of her while he lived. Why, some one might have asked, was this man so distressed, so distracted, so infatuated in his grief? Who was she that had been taken from him? Did all the beauty of the skies, all the gladness of the earth, all affection, love, joy, and thought centre but in her alone? Had the mercy of God, and his bounty to this being whom he still supported, been utterly extinguished when the eyes of her whom he loved were closed in death? Who and what may she have been, that must thus madly and hopelessly be for ever deplored?

To an indifferent heart, these questions could not have been

satisfactorily answered. She who had died, and who was thus ceaselessly bewailed, was but one of many many, most worthy when known to be beloved, but who, undistinguished amongst their fellow-creatures, live, and die, and go to heaven. Simon Gray had married her when they were both young, both humble, as indeed they always had been, and both poor. She brought to him pure affection, a heart full of tenderness and pity, a disposition as sweet as ever tinged a woman's cheek with smiles, cheerfulness never obscured, simple thoughts reconciled in joy to a simple life, and a faith in religion as perfect as in the light of the outer day. In her quiet and narrow neighbourhood she was thought not without her beauty; and whatever that might have been, it sufficed to delight the heart and soul of Simon Gray, when she became his bride. For twenty years never had they been a whole day apart. No change had ever taken place in their affection, but such change as nature graciously brings when new loves and new duties arise to bless the wedded life. Simon Gray never thought of comparing his wife with others. In herself she was a bliss to him. God gave her to him, and perhaps he thought in his soul that he might be resigned were God to take her away. Such was the spirit that breathed over his constant thoughts, and actions, and discourses; and in him it was unaffected and sincere. But who knows his own soul? God did take her away, and then it was known to him how ungrateful and how miserably weak was his heart—how charged, haunted, and torn with vain passion and lamentation, with outcries of grief that have no comfort, with recklessness and despair.

He seemed now to be without any object in this world. His very zeal in the cause he sincerely loved was deadened—and he often durst not say the things he ought when preaching of the loving-kindness of his God. The seat below the pulpit, and close to it, where for so many years he had seen the composed and attentive faces of his beloved wife and children, was now often empty—or people in it he cared not for—indeed, he cared less and less every Sabbath for the congregation he had long so truly loved; and the bell that formerly sent a calm joy into his heart, ringing through the leafy shelter of the summer trees, or tinkling in the clear wintry sky, now gave pangs of grief, or its sound was heard with indifference and apathy. He was, in many things, unconsciously a changed man indeed,—and in some where he perceived and felt the change, with unavailing self-upbraiding and with fear and trembling before his Creator and Redeemer. This sore and sad alteration in their Minister was observed with grief and compassion by all his parishioners. But what could they do for him? They must not obtrude themselves too often on the privacy, the sanctity of sorrow; but he was remembered in their prayers, and many an eye wept, and many a voice faltered, when by the cottage firesides they talked of their poor Minister's afflictions, and the woeful change that had been wrought in so short a time within that Manse which had so long stood like the abode of an almost perfect blessedness.

A rueful change was indeed beginning to take place in the state of Simon Gray's soul, of which no one out of the Manse could have had any suspicion, and which for a while was not suspected even by his own attached and faithful servants. Without comfort under the perpetual power of despondency and depression, hopeless, and not wishing for hope, afraid at last of the uncompanioned silence of his solitary hearth, and with a mind certainly weakened in some degree by that fever of grief, Simon Gray dimly turned his thoughts to some means of alleviating his miseries, be they what they might, and he began to seek sleep during the night from the influence of dangerous drugs. These often gave him nights unhaunted by those beloved spectres whose visits were unsupportable to his soul. They occasioned even thoughts and fancies alien and remote from what he so loved and feared; and now and then touched his disconsolate spirit with something like a gleam of transitory gladness. One moment to be happy, was something that his weakened mind conceived to be a gain. Afraid and terrified with his own thoughts, great relief was it to be placed, even for the shortest time, out of their tormenting power. The sentence of death was then, as it were, remitted—or, at least, a respite granted, or the hope of a respite. And when his fire was out—the Manse dark and silent, and the phantoms about to return, he flew to this medicine in an agony, and night after night, till at last it followed regularly the unhappy man's prayers; and Simon Gray, so that his loss might be buried in oblivion, resigned himself into that visionary or insensible sleep.

No doubt his mental sufferings were often thus relieved; but the sum of his misery was increased. Horrid fantasies sometimes assailed him—his health suffered—a deep remorse was added to his other agonies—the shame, the perturbation of despicable vice, and the appalling conviction brought in flashes upon his understanding, that it too was weakened, and that his life might terminate in imbecility or madness.

He had now several separate states of existence, that came by degrees into ghastly union. One was his own natural, widowed, childless, forlorn, uncompanioned, and desolate condition—without one glimpse of comfort, and unendurable altogether to his cold and sickened heart. From that he flew, in desperation, into a world of visions. Then the dead seemed reanimated—the silent burst into song—and sunshine streamed, as of yore, through the low windows of the Manse, and fragrance from the clambering honeysuckle filled every room. The frenzied man forgot his doom, and whenever a door opened, he looked to see his wife and children. The potent drugs then blessed his brain; and his countenance beamed with smiles sad to behold, born of that lamentable delusion. But erelong this spell began to dissolve. Then came horrid hints of the truth. One corpse after another lay before him—he knew them, and went up to close their eyes—then a sense of his own pitiable prostration of mind came over him; and still unable to know certainly whether he was or was not a childless widower, he would burst out into a

long hysterical laugh, strike his burning forehead, and then fling himself down on bed or floor, to him alike, or sit in his lonely room, in utter stupefaction, and with cheeks bathed in tears. The servants would come in, and look upon him in pity, and then go their ways, without uttering a word.

The whole manners and appearance of the Minister of Seatoun were now visibly changed to the most careless eye. His sedate and gentle demeanour was converted into a hurried and distracted wildness. Sometimes he was observed in black melancholy and despair—and then again in a sort of aimless and unbecoming glee. His dress was not the same—his countenance had the wrinkles but not the paleness of grief—his hand trembled, and his voice sounded not like the voice of the same man. A miserable rumour spread over the parish. The austere expressed dissatisfaction—the gentle pitied—the thoughtless smiled;—but all confessed that such a change had never been known before as that which had taken place in the Minister of Seatoun—and that, alas! his life was likely to end in disgrace as well as sorrow. His degradation could not be concealed. Simon Gray, the simple, the temperate, the pious, and the just, was now a winebibber and a drunkard.

The Manse now stood as if under ban of excommunication. All the gravel walks, once so neat, were overgrown with weeds; the hedges were unpruned; cattle browsed often in the garden; and dust and cobwebs stained and darkened every window. Instead of the respectable farmers of the parish, the elders, or some of the few neighbouring gentry, being seen entering or leaving the Manse, none but men of doubtful reputation, or bad, opened the gate—strangers of mean appearance, and skulking demeanour, haunted it, and lingered about at twilight—and not unfrequently the noise, clamour, and quarrelling of drunken revelry startled the passer-by from bounds wherein, at such hours, formerly all had been silent, except, perhaps, the sweet sound of the evening psalm.

It was not possible that all respect could easily or soon be withdrawn from a man once so universally and so deservedly honoured. His vice proceeded from the weakness of his heart, that had lived too much on its own love and on its own happiness, and when these stays were removed fell down into this humiliation. Many excuses—many palliations—many denials were framed for him, and there was often silence at his name. After almost all respect was gone, affection remained nearly as strong as before; for that Simon Gray had been a good man none denied; and now, too, were joined to the affection for him a profound pity and pure compassion. "Was he not a widower? Was he not childless? Surely few had been tried as he had been tried—and it was easy to see that the poor man's grief had affected his brain. The minister is not in his right mind—but we trust in God that he may get better." Such were the words of many, and the wishes of all. For he had no enemies—and he had for nearly twenty years been a friend to them all, both in things temporal and things eternal.

But the hour of his ruin was fast approaching. Perhaps the miserable man knew that he was lost. Perhaps he took an insane pleasure in looking forward to his utter destruction. He was now the abject slave of his vice—whatever passed within his troubled and often clouded mind, he seemed often to have no shame now—no desire of concealment, but was seen in the open daylight, in presence of old age that mourned, and childhood that could only wonder, a rueful spectacle of degradation, laughing or perhaps weeping, with his senses drowned or inflamed, ignorant of himself and of his profession, and seemingly forgetful even of the name of his parish, and of the house in whose quiet secrecy he had passed so many years of temperance, happiness, and virtue.

A melancholy confusion was now in all his mind. Subjects once familiar to him were now almost forgotten; truths once clear to him as sunshine were now no more known; the great doctrines of Christianity, which he had so long taught with simplicity and fervour, became to his weakened and darkened understanding words without meaning; even the awful events of his Saviour's life from the hour when he was laid in the manger till he died on the cross, were at times dimly recognised, for all now was glimmering and ghastly in the world of his memory. One night he was seen sitting beside the graves of his wife and children. The infatuated man fixed on them his glazed and wild eyes, and muttered unintelligible lamentations and blessings. Most sad—most shocking—most terrible, was it to behold such a man in such a place, in such pitiable degradation. For one year had not yet elapsed since Simon Gray had been leading a life of innocent simplicity, a perfect model of what ought to be the simple and austere minister of a simple and austere church. There he was seen by a few, now wringing his hands, now patting the tombstone on his wife's grave, now kneeling down, now kissing it, now lifting up his convulsed face to Heaven, alternately yielding to a wailing tenderness, and a shuddering horror,—forgetful now of every thing but the dim confusion of all those deaths and his own miseries, and now seemingly assailed with a dreadful consciousness of his miserable degradation, till, with a horrid groan, long, low, and deep, of mortal grief, he rose up from the ground, gazed ghastly round all over the tombstones with a bewildered eye, glared upon the little kirk and its spire now bright with the light of the setting sun, and then, like a wandering and punished ghost, disappeared into the shady and neglected garden of the Manse.

Enslaved as Simon Gray now was to his vice, or indeed, disease, yet such was the solemn and awful power over his mind which the Sabbath-day possessed, that he had never once polluted or violated its sanctity. In cases of furious insanity, it has been known that patients whose lives had been religious have felt the influence of strong habitual association, and kept a wild Sabbath even in their cells. With the Minister of Seatoun this mysterious force had hitherto imposed a saving restraint. His congregation was sadly thinned, but still he performed divine service; and no one at least

could say that they had ever seen the wretched man under the dominion of the sin that so easily beset him, in the pulpit. But that hour now came; and he was ruined past all earthly redemption.

Next day the Elders went to the Manse. His servants made no opposition to their entrance, nor did they deny that their minister was at home. They had not, indeed, seen him since the evening before; but they had heard his footsteps and his voice, and knew that he was not dead. So the Elders walked upstairs, to his room, and found him sitting near the window, looking out upon the churchyard, through and below the rich flowery foliage of the horse-chestnuts and sycamores that shadowed both Manse and Kirk. He was fully awakened to the horrors of his situation, and for a while spoke not a word. "Come down with me into the parlour," he said; and they did so. They all sat down and there was yet silence. They feared to turn their eyes upon him, as he stood by himself in the midst of them—pallid, ghastly, shuddering—the big burning tears of guilt, and shame, and despair, falling down upon the floor. "Lost am I in this world and in the next! I have disgraced the order to which I belong—I have polluted the church—I have insulted the God who made me, and the Saviour who redeemed me! Oh! never was there a sinner like unto me!" He dashed himself down on the floor—and beseeched that no one would lift him up. "Let me hear your voices, while I hide my face. What have you to say unto your wretched minister? Say it quickly—and then leave me lying on the floor. Lift me not up!"

His body lay there, in this prostration of the spirit, before men who had all known him, loved him, respected him, venerated him, not more than one year ago. Much of that was for ever gone now; but much remained unextinguishable in their hearts. Some of them were austere, and even stern men, of his own age, or older than he; but there are times and occasions when the sternest become the most compassionate. So was it now. They had come not to upbraid or revile—not even to rebuke. They brought with them sorrow and tribulation, and even anguish in their souls. For they knew that his ministry was at an end; that Simon Gray was now nothing unto them but a fallen and frail being, whose miseries they, themselves fallen and frail too, were by nature called upon to pity—and they wished, if possible, to give comfort and advice, and to speak with him of his future life. Why should they be stern or cruel to this man? They had sat often and often at his simple board when his wife and family graced and blessed it;—he, too, had often and often familiarly and brotherly sat in all their houses, humble, but scarcely more humble than his own—he had joined some of them in wedlock—baptized their children—remembered them in his public prayers when any of them had been threatened with death—he had prayed, too, by their bedsides in their own houses—he had given them worldly counsel—and assisted them in their worldly trials—and was all this to be forgotten now? And were they to harden their hearts against him? Or, were not all these things to be remembered with a grateful distinctness; and to soften their hearts; and even to

bedew their faces with tears; and to fill their whole souls with pity, sorrow, affection, and the sadness of brotherly love towards him who, so good in many things, had, at last, been weighed in the balance and found wanting? They all felt alike now, however different their dispositions and characters. They did not long suffer him to lie on the floor—they lifted him up—tried to comfort him—wept along with him—and when the miserable man implored one of the number to offer a prayer for him, they all solemnly knelt down, and hoped that God, who was now called upon to forgive his sins, would extend his mercy to all the fellow-sinners who were then together upon their knees.

Simon Gray was no more a Minister of the Church of Scotland, and he left the parish. It was thought by many that he was dead —that shame and remorse, and the disease that clung close to his soul, had killed him at last. But it was not so. The hour was not yet come, and his death was destined to be of a different kind indeed.

The unfortunate man had a brother who, for many years, had lived on a great sheep-farm in Strathglass, a wild district of the Northern Highlands. He had always stood high in the esteem and love of this uneducated, but intelligent farmer—he had visited him occasionally with his wife and children for a few days, and had received similar visits in return. This good and worthy man had grieved for Simon's bereavement, and his subsequent frailties; and now he opened the door of his house, and of his heart, to his degraded, and remorseful, and repentant brother. His own wife, his sons, and his daughters, needed not to be told to treat with tenderness, respect, and pity, the most unfortunate man; and, on the evening when he came to their house, they received him with the most affectionate warmth, and seemed, by the cheerfulness of their manners, not even to know of the miserable predicament in which he stood. Happy were all the young people to see their uncle in the Highlands, although at first they felt sad and almost surprised to observe that he was dressed just like their father, in such clothes as become, on decent occasions, a hard-working labouring man, a little raised above the wants of the world.

Even before the heart of poor Simon Gray had time to be touched, or, at least, greatly revived, by the unrestrained kindness of all those worthy people, the very change of scenery had no inconsiderable effect in shrouding in oblivion much of his past misery. Here, in this solitary glen, far, far away from all who had witnessed his vices and his degradation, he felt relieved from a load of shame that had bowed him to the earth. Many long miles of moor—many great mountains—many wide straths and glens—many immense lakes—and a thousand roaring streams and floods, were now between him and the manse of Seatoun—the kirk, where he had been so miserably exposed—and the air of his parish, that lay like a load on his eyes when they had dared to lift themselves up to the sunshine. Many enormous belts and girdles of rock separated him from all these; he felt safe in his solitude from the power of excommunication; and there was none to upbraid him with their black silent counte-

nances, as he walked by himself along the heathery shores of a Highland loch, or plunged into a dark pine-forest, or lay upon the breast of some enormous mountain, or sat by the roar of some foaming cataract. And when he went into a lonely shieling, or a smoky hut, all the dwellers there were unknown to him—and, blessed be God, he was unknown to them;—their dress, their gaze, their language, their proffered food and refreshment, were all new—they bore no resemblance to what he had seen and heard in his former life. That former life was like a far off, faint, and indistinct dream. But the mountain—the forest—the glen—the cataract—the loch—the rocks—the huts—the deer—the eagles—the wild Gaelic dresses—and that wilder speech—all were real—they constituted the being of his life now; and, as the roar of the wind came down the glens, it swept away the remembrance of his sins and his sorrows.

But a stronger, at least a more permanent power was in his brother's house, and it was that from which his recovery or restoration was ultimately to proceed.

The sudden desolation of his heart, that in so brief a period had been robbed of all it held dear, had converted Simon Gray from temperance almost austere, into a most pitiable state of vicious indulgence; and his sudden restoration now to domestic comfort and objects of interest to a good man's human feelings, began to work almost as wonderful a conversion from that wretched habit to his former virtue. New eyes were upon him — new hearts opened towards him—new voices addressed him with kindness—new objects were presented to his mind. The dull, dreary, silent, forsaken, and haunted Manse, where every room swarmed with unendurable thoughts, was exchanged for an abode entirely free from all recollections and associations, either too affecting or too afflicting. The simple gladness that reigned in his brother's house stole insensibly into his soul, reviving and renovating it with feelings long unknown. There was no violent or extravagant joy in which he could not partake, and that might form a distressing and galling contrast with his own grief. A homely happiness was in the house, in every room, and about every person, and he felt himself assimilated, without effort of his own, in some measure to the cheerful, blameless, and industrious beings with whom it was now his lot to associate. He had thought himself lost, but he felt that yet might he be saved; he had thought himself excommunicated from the fellowship of the virtuous, but he felt himself treated, not only with affection, but respect, by his excellent brother, all his nephews and nieces, and the servants of the house. His soul hoped that its degradation was not utter and irretrievable. Human beings, he began to see, could still love, still respect, even while they pitied him; and this feeling of being not an outcast from his kind, encouraged him humbly to lift his eyes up to God, and less ruefully, and not with such bitter agony, to prostrate himself in prayer.

He thus found himself lifted out of the den of perdition; and escaped into the clear unhaunted light, he felt unspeakable horror at the thought of voluntarily flinging himself back again among

these dreadful agonies. His brother rejoiced to behold the change, so unexpectedly sudden, in all his habits ; and, when they went out together in the evenings to walk among the glens, that simple man laid open to Simon all his heart—spoke to him of all his affairs—requested his advice—and behaved towards him with such entire and sincere respect and affection, that the fallen man felt entitled again to hold up his head, and even enjoyed hours of internal peace and satisfaction, which at first he was afraid to suffer, lest they might be the offspring of apathy or delusion. But day after day they more frequently returned and more lastingly remained ; and then Simon Gray believed that God was, indeed, accepting his repentance, and that his soul might yet not be utterly lost.

Simon Gray went out with the servants to their work, himself a servant. He worked for his brother and his children, and while his body was bent and his hands were busy, his heart was at rest. The past could not take direful possession of him when labouring in the fields, or in the garden, or in the barn, or searching for the sheep in snow or tempest, with his brother or his nephews. The pure fresh air blew around his temples—the pure fresh water was his drink—toil brought hunger which the simple meal appeased—and for every meal that his brother blessed, did he himself reverently return thanks to God. So was it settled between them ; and Simon Gray, on such occasions, in fervid eloquence, expressed his heart. He rose with the light or the lark—all his toils were stated—all his hours of rest ; and in a few months he was even like one who, from his boyhood, had been a shepherd or a tiller of the earth.

In this humble, laborious, and, it may be said, happy life, years passed over his head, which was now getting white. Suffice it to say, that once more Simon Gray was as temperate as a hermit. He knew—he remembered—he repented all his former shameful transgressions. But now they were to him only as a troubled dream. Now, too, could he bear to think on all his former life, before he was tried and fell—of his beloved Susanna, and the children sleeping by her side in Seatoun churchyard—and of that dear, but guilty boy, who died in a foreign land. In his solitary labours in the field, or on his chaff-bed, his mind, and his heart, and his soul were often in the happy Manse of former years. He walked in the garden, and down the burn-side, through the birch-wood, and by the little waterfall, with his wife, and boys and girl—and then could he bear to think of the many many Sabbaths he had officiated in his own kirk, on all the baptisms, and that other greater Sacrament, administered, on beautiful weather, in the open air, and beneath the shadow of that wide-armed sycamore. Calmly, now, and with an untroubled spirit, did he think on all these things ; for he was reconciled to his present lot, which he knew must never be changed, and to his humbled heart came soothingly and sweet all the voices of the dead, and all the shadows of the past. He knew now the weakness of his own soul. Remorse and penitence had brought up all its secrets before him ; and in resignation and contentment, morning and evening, did he for all his gracious mercies praise God.

Simon had taught his brother's children, and they all loved him as their very father. Some of their faces were like the faces of their dead cousins—and some of them bore the very same voices. So seemed it that his very children were restored to him—the power of the grave was weakened over his heart—and though he sometimes felt, and said himself, that the living, though like the dead, were not his own blessed creatures, yet he gave them up all of a father's heart that was not buried in those graves which had so quickly, one after the other, employed the old sexton's spade. And often, no doubt, when his heart was perfectly calm and happy, did he love his brother's children even as he had loved his own.

Many years thus passed away, and with them almost all tradition, in this part of the country, of Simon's degradation from the clerical order. It had faded in simple hearts occupied with their own feelings; and when he was in company with others at church or market, not even those who knew all the circumstances of his case could be said to remember them—they saw before them only a plain, simple, grave, and contented person like themselves, in a humble walk of life. Simon's own mind had been long subdued to his lot. He felt himself to be what he appeared; and he was distinguishable from his brother, whom in aspect and figure he greatly resembled, only by an air of superior intelligence and cultivation. His hands were, like his brother's, hardened by the implements of labour—his face was as embrowned by the sun—and his dress, on week-day and Sabbath, alike plain, and in all respects that of a respectable tenant. It seemed now that he was likely to terminate his blameless life in peace.

His brother was now obliged to go to the Lowlands on the affairs of his farm, and so many years having elapsed since Simon's degradation, he felt an irresistible desire to revisit, once before he died, the neighbourhood at least of his dear parish once his own, if not the dear parish itself. Many must have now forgotten him; and indeed ten years, at his period of life, and all his severe miseries, had done the work of twenty—so although but sixty years of age, he seemed at least a man of threescore and ten. Accordingly, he accompanied his brother to the Lowlands—once more walked about the streets and squares of the city, where so many changes had taken place that he scarcely knew his way, and where the very population itself seemed entirely changed. He felt comforted that no eye rested upon him; and next day—a fine clear bright frost, and the ground covered with snow—he went with his brother to a village distant about ten miles only from his own Manse of Scatoun. But a river and two ranges of hills lay between—so there was little danger of his meeting any one who would recognise him to have been the minister of that parish. Simon was happy, but thoughtful, and his nearness to the place of his former life did not, he thought, affect him so powerfully, at least not so overwhelmingly, as he had expected. A party of farmers from different districts dined together, and after dinner one of them, whose treatment of Simon, though not absolutely insulting, had been rude and boisterous all day, began to indulge in

very brutal talk, and to swallow liquor with an evident design to produce intoxication. Simon endeavoured to avoid all conversation with this person, but on one occasion could not avoid gently remonstrating with him on his grossness. He also kindly dissuaded him from drinking too much, a sin of which, from bitter experience, he had known the miserable effects, and of which he had in many others wrought the cure. But his remonstrance enraged the young farmer, who, it seems, came from the parish of Seatoun, and knew Simon's whole history. He burst out into the most ferocious invectives against his reprover, and soon showed that he was but too intimately acquainted with all the deplorable and degrading circumstances of the case. In the coarsest terms he informed the whole company who they had got amongst them; directed their attention to the solemn hypocrisy of his countenance; assured them that his incontinence had not been confined to drinking; and that even in the Highlands, the old sinner had corrupted the menials in his brother's house, and was the reproach of all Lowlanders that visited Strathglass.

This sudden, unprovoked, and unexpected brutality annihilated Simon's long-gathered fortitude. The shocking, coarse, and unfeeling words were not all false—and they brought upon his troubled and sickening heart not the remembrance of his woeful trangression, but it may be said its very presence. Ten years of penitence, and peace, and virtue, and credit, were at once destroyed,—to him they were as nothing,—and he was once more Simon Gray the sinner, the drunkard, the disgraced, the degraded, the madman. He looked around him, and it seemed as if all eyes were fixed upon him with pity, or contempt, or scorn. He heard malicious whisperings—curious interrogatories—and stifled laughter; and, loud over all, the outrageous and brutal merriment of his insulter, the triumphant peal of self-applauding brutality, and the clenched hand struck upon the table in confirmation of the truth of his charge, and in defiance of all gainsayers. Simon Gray saw—heard no more. He rushed out of the room in an agony of shame and despair, and found himself standing alone in the darkness.

He thanked God that it was a wild, stormy, winter night. The farmers had not ventured to mount their horses in that snow-drift—but Simon turned his face to the flaky blast, and drove along knee-deep, turning a deaf ear to his brother's voice which he heard shouting his name. He knew not whither he was thus rushing—for as yet he had no determined purpose in his mind. One wish alone had he at this hour—and that was to fall down and die. But the snow was not so deep a short way out of the village, and the energy which his despair had given his limbs enabled him to pursue his solitary race through the howling darkness of the night. He noticed nothing but the tops of the hedges on each side that marked out the road;—and without aim or object, but a dim hope of death, or a passion for the concealing and hiding darkness, he thus travelled several miles, till he found himself entering upon a wide common or moor. "I am on the edge of the moor," he exclaimed to himself, "the moor of my own parish—my own Seatoun. No eye can see me—blessed be God no

eye can see me,—but mine eyes can see the shape of the small swelling hills and mounts, covered though they be with snow, and neither moon nor stars in heaven. Yes, I will walk on now that I am here, right on to the kirk of Seatoun, and will fall down upon my knees at the door of God's house, and beseech Him, after all my repentance, to restore to peace my disconsolate, my troubled and despairing soul."

There had been but little change for ten years in that pastoral parish. The small wooden bridge across the Ewe-bank stood as it did before, and, as his feet made it shake below him, Simon's heart was filled with a crowd of thoughts. He was now within a few hundred yards of the Manse that had so long been his own, and he stood still and trembled, and shivered, as the rush of thoughts assailed him from the disturbed world of the past. He moved on. A light was in the parlour window—the same room in which he used to sit with his wife and children. Perhaps he wept by himself in the darkness. But he hurried on—he passed the mouth of the little avenue—the hedges and shrubs seemed but little grown—through a pale glimmer in the sky, while a blast had blown away some clouds from before the yet hidden moon, he saw the spire of his own Kirk. The little gate was shut—but he knew well to open the latch. With a strange wild mixture of joy and despair he reached the door of the Kirk, and falling down prostrate in the pelting snow, he kissed the cold stone beneath his cheek, and, with a breaking heart, ejaculated, "Oh God! am I forgiven—and wilt thou take me, through the intercession of thy Son, at last into thy holy presence?"

It snowed till midnight—and the frost was bitter cold. Next morning was the Sabbath; and the old Sexton, on going to sweep the little path from the churchyard gate to the door of the church, found what was seemingly a corpse, lying there half-covered with the drift. He lifted up the head; and well did he know the face of his former minister. The hair was like silver that formerly had been a bright brown; but the expression of the dead man's countenance was perfectly serene—and the cold night had not been felt by Simon Gray.

THE RAINBOW.

A SOLITARY Pedestrian was roaming over the glens and mountains in a wild district of the Northern Highlands of Scotland, when a Rainbow began to form itself over part of the magnificent landscape. He was, not without reason, a melancholy and grief-haunted man; and the growing beauty of that apparition insensibly touched his heart with a delighted happiness to which he had for a considerable time been a stranger. As the varied brightness of the arch, which as yet was scarcely united, but showed only several glowing fragments, gradually became more vivid, his whole being felt a sym-

pathetic exhilaration—despondency and sorrow faded away, and he once more exulted in the natural freedom of the prime of life. While he was gazing, the Rainbow became perfect, and bound the earth and heaven together in a span of joy. The glory illuminated two mountains, and the glen between them opening up beneath that effulgence appeared to be a majestic entrance into another and more magnificent world. The sides of these two mountains, rent with chasms and tumbling torrents, were steeped in the beautiful stains of the arch, so that the rocks seemed clothed with purple, and the waterfalls to roll down in gold. As the Rainbow began to dissolve, the summit of the arch gave way, and the gorgeous colours, forsaking the sky, embodied themselves in a mass of splendour on each side of that wide glen. For a few moments the edge of each mountain was veiled and hidden in that radiance; but it gradually melted away into colourless air, the atmosphere was again open, and a few showery clouds seen hanging opposite the sun, were all that remained to tell of the vanished Rainbow. But all the green fields and all the woods were glittering in freshened beauty—the birds were singing—the cattle lowing on the hills—and the raven and the kite were aloft in heaven. There was a jubilee—and the lonely man who had been sitting on a rock, entranced in that vision, rose up and inwardly said, "Let my way lie up that glen whose glorious portal has vanished—let me walk beneath what was like a triumphal arch but a moment ago, into the solitary magnificence of nature."

The Eremite pursued his way up the wooded banks of a stony torrent, and on reaching the summit of the cliffs saw before him a long expanse of black sullen moor—which he crossed—and a beautiful vale suddenly expanded below his feet, with cultivated fields, woods, and groves, and among many huts sprinkled about like rocks, one Mansion to which they all seemed to appertain, and which, without any grandeur, yet suited in its unpretending and venerable solemnity the character of that lonely and lovely place. He descended into the vale, and happy he knew not why, walked along the widening stream, till he found himself in a lawn, and close by the mansion which he had discerned from the hill above, but which had till now been concealed by a grove. At this moment, just as he was about to turn back, two ladies stood close beside him, and with a slight embarrassment the stranger explained to them how unconsciously he had been led to intrude upon their privacy, and after that salutation was about to retire. But the impression which elegant and cultivated minds make on each other in a moment, when unexpectedly brought together in a situation calculated to show something of their character, now prevented so sudden a parting—and they who had thus casually met, having entered into conversation, began in a few minutes to feel almost like friends. The stranger, who had been led into this vale by a sort of romantic impulse, could not help feeling as if this meeting were almost an adventure. And it was no doubt an impressive thing to a young Englishman wandering among the Highland mountains, to form an acquaintance in this way with two such persons as those with whom

he was now engaged in pleasant conversation. They seemed to be mother and daughter; and when, after about half an hour's walk, the stranger found himself in a spacious and elegant room, the guest of a high-bred and graceful lady in a widow's weeds, and apparently with one beautiful daughter in her retirement, he could scarcely help thinking that the vague imagination which had led him thither under the Rainbow's arch, might have some influence even on the complexion of his future life. He had long been a melancholy man; and minds of that character are often the most apt to give way to sudden emotions of gladness. He closed up all remembrance of one fatal incident in his life under a heap of fresh-springing and happy thoughts and feelings; and animated by the novelty of his situation, as well as by the interesting character of those whose hospitality he was now sharing, never had he felt so free from anxiety and sorrow, and so like his former self, nor so capable of the enjoyment of life and every thing around him that was beautiful and enlivening. As the evening drew on, his heart was sad to think that, as he had come a stranger, so like a stranger must he be departing; but these few hours had sunk into his heart, and he would remember them as long as he lived, and in the remotest parts of the earth.

Does it require long time, days, weeks, months, and years, to enable human beings to love one another? Does the human heart slowly and suspiciously lay up one kind thought after another, till the measure of its affection be full? May gentle words and kindling smiles pass from the lips, and yet the heart remain cold and untouched, and willing to lose sight of, and to forget, the object of its transitory tenderness? It may be so with many, for the accidents of time teach different lessons, all equally necessary and wholesome perhaps to different hearts; but before human nature has been sorely afflicted, tried, or deceived, its temper is open to kindness and to joy; and attracted by the sympathies of a common nature, why may not those who are strangers to-day, be friends to-morrow? Nor does the deepest affliction always close up the fountains of love in the human soul. The saddest turn often is sudden restoration to the gay and joyful; like light streaming in upon a prisoner through the bars of his dungeon, is the smile on faces not yet bedimmed by grief, to the man of many miseries; and he who hugs his sorrow close to his soul, will often at once lay down that rueful burden to which he has long clung with infatuated despair, at the sight of youth, beauty, and innocence rejoicing before him in untamed, fearless, and triumphant bliss. There are often, also, sudden revelations of sympathy made between human beings by a word, a tone, a look, or a smile; truth is then conveyed suddenly and easily into their spirits, and from that moment they rest assured of each other's affection and each other's worth, as much as if they had been mutually known for years. If there were not these strong and prevailing tendencies in our nature, the paths of human life would be barren indeed; or the friendships that spring up over them would, in general, be sown by the hand of interest or self-love. But nature follows

other processes; and love and friendship, at first sight, often spring up as necessarily as flowers expand from bud into blossom in the course of a few sunny and dewy hours of one vernal morning.

The young English stranger felt this when the hour of his departure was come, and when the mother and daughter accompanied him down the vale in the dusk of the evening, on his way from Glen-Creran, never more to return, little was said as they walked along, and they who, a few hours before, had not known of each other's existence, were now about to say farewell, with sighs, almost with tears. At length the stranger paused, and said: "Never will I forget this day, this glen, and those from whom I now part. I will remember them all when my soul is sad, which it ever must be as long as I live. Take the blessing of a wounded heart. Ladies, farewell!"—and his eyes, dim with emotion, at that moment met those of that beautiful maiden, turned upon him with a heavenly expression of pity, and at last even stained with irrepressible tears. A black scowl was in the heavens, and darkened the green mount on which they stood—a long dreary sigh of wind came rustling down the vale, and there was a low muttering of distant thunder.

"This will be a night of storms," said the lady, looking kindly towards the stranger. "It is not Highland hospitality to let a guest depart at dark, and in tempest—you must return with us to our house;" and a huge thunderous cloud, that overshadowed half the vale, was an argument not to be resisted. So the party returned together, and just as they reached the house, the long loud rattle was heard along the hills, and the river, swollen on a sudden by the deluging rain, roared along the swinging woods, till the whole valley was in a tumult. It was a true Highland night; and the old house rocked like a ship at sea.

But the walls of the Mansion (which had once been a sort of castle) were thick and massy, and the evening passed happily along within, while the thunder, and the woods, and the torrents, and the blasts, were all raging without in one united and most dismal howl. These Ladies had not passed all their lives in a Highland glen, and they conversed with their guest about foreign countries which they had all visited. The harp was touched, and the wild Gaelic airs sounded still more wildly among the fitful pauses of the storm. She who played and sung was no sorceress inhabiting an enchanted castle; but she was a young, graceful, and beautiful girl of nineteen, innocent as beautiful, and therefore a more powerful sorceress than any that ever wound the invisible lines of her spell round a Knight of Romance. At the conclusion of one air, a Chieftain's Lament, the mother heaved a deep sigh; and in the silence that ensued, the artless girl said to the stranger, who was standing beside her, entranced by the wailing strain, "My poor dead brother used to love that air—I ought not to have sung it." But that mood passed away; and before retiring to rest, the stranger said gaily, "Your wandering guest's name is Ashton." "We are Stuarts," was the reply; and in an hour the house was buried in sleep.

The stranger alone was wakeful. Not for several years had he

been so happy as during this day and evening; and the image of that lovely girl beside her harp, sweetly singing, while the wild night was roaring in the glen, could not leave his thoughts. Even when, towards morning, he fell asleep, she was in his dreams; and then it seemed as if they had long been friends—as if they were betrothed—and had fixed their marriage-day. From these visions he awoke, and heard the sound of the mountain torrent roaring itself to rest, and the trees swinging less fiercely in the weakened blast. He then recollected where he was—his real condition returned upon him—and that sweet maiden was then to him only a phantom once seen, and to smile upon him no more. He rose at sunrise, and from the window, contemplated the gradual dying away of the storm—the subsiding of the torrent, that became visibly less and less every minute—the calm that slowly settled on the woods—the white mists rolling up the mountain's side—till, at last, a beautiful, calm, serene and sunny day took possession of the sky, and Glen-Creran lay below, in smiling and joyful beauty, a wild paradise, where the world might be forgotten, and human life pass away like a dream.

It was the Sabbath-day, and Glen-Creran, that a few hours ago had been as loud as the sea, was now not only hushed in the breathing repose of nature, but all rural labour was at rest; and it might almost have been said, that the motionless clouds, the deep blue vault, the fragrant air, and the still earth, were all united together in one sweet spirit of devotion. No shepherd shouted on the mountain—no reapers were in the half-shorn fields—and the fisherman's net was hung up to dry in the sunshine. When the party met again in the parlour, whose wide window opening down to the floor, let in the pure fragrance of the roses and honeysuckles, and made the room a portion, as it were, of the rich wooded scenery, there was blended with the warmth and kindliness of the morning salutation, a solemn expression belonging to the hallowed day, and to the religious state of feeling which it inspired. The subdued and almost melancholy air of the Matron was now more touching and impressive, as she was dressed in darker widow's weeds for the house of God; and the sweet countenance of Mary Stuart, which, the night before, had beamed with almost a wild gladness, was now breathed over by a pensive piety, so truly beautiful at all times on a woman's features. The Kirk was some miles distant, but they were prepared to walk to it; and Edward Ashton, without speaking on the subject at all, accompanied them on their way to divine service.

To an Englishman, who had never before seen a Highland Sabbath, the scene was most delightful, as the opening of every little glen brought upon him some new interesting group, journeying tranquilly towards Appin Kirk. Families were coming down together into the wider strath, from their green nests among the solitude; and friendly greetings were interchanging on all sides, in that wild tongue which, to his ear, seemed so well suited to a land of mountains. The many-coloured Highland tartan mixed with the pure white of dresses from the Lowlands; and that mingling of different costumes in the same group gave intimation of the friendly inter-

course now subsisting constantly between the dwellers of hill and of plain. No haughty equipages came sweeping by. Almost all the assembling congregation were on foot—here and there an old man on a rough mountain pony—there, perhaps, man and wife on a stronger steed—and there a cart with an invalid, or the weak or aged, with a due accompaniment of children. The distinction of ranks was still visible, but it was softened down by one pervading spirit of humble Christianity. So trooped they along to the house of God—the clear tinkle of the bell was heard—the seats were filled—and the whole vale echoed to the voice of psalms. Divine service was, at this time, performed in the English language, and the Kirk was decently silent in sincere and unostentatious devotion.

During service, the Englishman chanced to fix his eyes on a small marble monumental slab in the wall above the seat, and he read these words—SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF CHARLES STUART, LATE CAPTAIN IN THE FORTY-SECOND REGIMENT, WHO DIED AT VIENNA, 3D AUGUST, 17—. A mortal sickness instantly struck his heart, and in that agony, which was indeed almost a swoon of the soul, he wished that he were dead, or buried in solitude many thousand miles away from the place where he now sate. He fixed his eyes upon the countenances—first of the mother—and then of her daughter, and a resemblance, which he had not discovered before, now grew upon him stronger and stronger, to one in his grave, and whom he once would have sacrificed his own life to reanimate. He was sitting in the House of God with the mother and sister of the man whose blood he had shed! The place—the name—the day of the month—left no possibility of doubt. And now many other corroborative circumstances came upon him in that ghastly fit. He remembered the daughter saying after that Lament sung to the harp, "I ought not to have sung it;—for my poor dead brother used to delight in that air." The murderer of that poor dead brother had come wandering to a solitary mansion among the mountains, impelled by some evil spirit, and was now sitting below his monument along with her who had given him birth. But every one was intent on the service of God—and his white face, white as a sheet, was observed by none. By degrees, he felt the blood circulating again from his stricken heart—he began to breathe more freely, and had just strength to stand up when the congregation rose to prayer. He saw glimmering and unsteady beside him the meek placid countenances of the widow and her daughter—and turned away his eyes from them, to fix them again on that inscription, to which they were drawn by a hideous spell. He heard not the closing benediction—but was relieved in some degree by the fresh air that whispered through the trees, as he found himself walking by the side of his almost unseen companions through the churchyard. "I fear, sir, you are ill," said Mary Stuart, in a sweet and hurried tone of voice—and no other answer was given but a long deep groan, that sounded as if it rose up in pangs from the bottom of a broken heart.

They walked along together in sorrow, fear, and astonishment, at this sudden change in the looks of their new friend, whose eyes, when

they ventured to look towards either of them, were wild and ghastly, and every glance accompanied with a deeper and bitterer sigh. "For the love of God—let us, if possible, retire from the crowd—and lead me to some retired place, that I may utter a few words, and then hide myself for ever from your faces."

They walked along a footpath that winded through a coppice-wood, and crossing a plank over a rivulet, in a few moments they were in a little glen, as lonely as if it had been far among the mountains. "No houses are in this direction," said the mother, somewhat agitated and alarmed, she knew not why—and they sat down together on a seat that had been cut out of the turf by the hands of some shepherd, or schoolboy, in his hours of play. "Mary, bring some water from that pool—Mr Ashton looks as if about to faint. My dear sir, are you better now?"—and the beautiful girl bathed his forehead with the cold limpid water, till he felt the sickness depart, and his soul revive.

He rose up from the seat, and looking steadfastly on their countenances, and then lifting his eyes to Heaven, he sank down on his knees before them—and said, "My name is now Ashton, but it was not always so—hateful, horrible, and accursed must that other name be to your ears—the name of Edward Sitwell."

The mother uttered a faint shriek, and her head fell back, while the daughter sat down by her side and clasped her arms with loud sobs round her neck. The stranger remained upon his knees, with his hands clasped, and his eyes fixed upon them who now beheld him not, for many a wild thought was hurrying through their hearts. At length the widow looked towards him with a dim and changeful expression, and then covering her eyes with both her hands, indistinctly said: "Fatal—fatal name, indeed! Has God brought before me, on his bended knees, the man beneath whose sword my dear Charles died! Oh! God of mercy, teach me how I should feel in this wild and most sudden trial."

"Pray for me—pray for me to God—and also intercede for me with your mother when I am far away; for, believe me when I say that I have not had many happy days since that fatal event;" and, rising from the ground, the stranger was about to depart. But there was something so irresistibly detaining in the pity that was fast streaming from the eyes of poor Mary Stuart, to whom he had addressed himself, that he stood riveted to the spot; and he thought, too, that the face of the mother began to look with less horror upon him, and seemed clouded with a humane and Christian compassion. He said nothing in his own vindication—he uttered a few words in praise of the dead—and standing before them with his pale cheeks, and convulsed sobs, and quivering lips, the sincerity of his sorrow and contrition could not but affect their souls, and bring over their gradually subsiding aversion a deep feeling of sympathy for him who felt so profoundly his own guilt. "Go not away from us, till we have both forgiven you—yes—receive his mother's forgiveness, and may your soul find rest from remorse, as mine has found rest from grief."

Three years had elapsed since the death of her son abroad in that duel, and the soul of this excellent woman had reached the ultimate stage of resignation. When, therefore, she recovered from that cold damp feeling of horror and aversion breathed over her by the presence of one whom, when the tidings of her son's death first came to her, she had thought of almost as a murderer, she began to reflect on the few words he had uttered, and on the profound passion manifest in all his behaviour. In spite of her natural repugnance, she could not help feeling that he might have fallen in that quarrel instead of her beloved son—that there were no circumstances dishonourable or cruel attending it—and that by his own confession the day before, when ignorant into whose house he had wandered, he had for a long time led a life of melancholy and despondence, arising from the remembrance of that event. His mild and gentle manners—his intelligent and cultivated mind—and the unequivocal symptoms of sensibility and humane emotions which his whole looks, conversation, and deportment had exhibited, pleaded for him not in vain; and when she looked upon him once more in the calmness of exhausted passion, the mother who, through his means, had been deprived of an only son, felt that she had wronged him by the violence of her feelings, and that it would be right, generous, forgiving, and pious, to raise him up from that fit of passion, and to look on him as an erring brother, to whom she knew her brave boy had been reconciled on his deathbed, and who had held his hand when he breathed his last. There was something, too, in the sacred influence of the Sabbath-day, that at once softened and comforted her heart; he had walked with her and her daughter to worship God in that little humble kirk, and ought she not now to practise those lessons of perfect forgiveness of all injuries, be they what they might, enjoined by that religion in which it was her blessing to believe? "Why should I have looked," thought she, "with such abhorrence and creeping of the blood on this young man? My boy is in his grave—I trust, in heaven. God has been merciful unto me, and therefore let me now still my beating heart, and administer comfort, since he needs it so much, to one whom not chance, but Providence, has brought to be my guest."

Such thoughts, when they had once entered her heart, found a permanent abode there—she was restored to a tranquillity wonderful even to herself—and, taking Edward Ashton by the hand, she told him with a faint smile, that he must not so leave them, and plunge alone into the dreary solitude of those black mountains, but accompany them back to the house, and, as they had joined together in the public worship of God, so would they that night kneel down together before going to rest, and beseech Him to be merciful to them who were all alike sinners.

During all this time Mary Stuart had stood pale and breathless as a statue, drinking in every word her mother uttered, marking every tone of her voice and every change of expression upon her countenance. She had been a mere girl when her brother went

abroad, and though she remembered him well, and had loved him with all the tender enthusiasm of childhood, yet her growing thoughts and feelings towards a thousand new objects, calculated by their nature to interest and delight her heart, had grown over that early affliction; and when she looked at her brother's picture on the wall of her bed-room, or the inscription on the marble slab in the kirk, it was with a perfectly calm spirit, without vain repining or regret, and with a pleasant revival of old remembrances otherwise half obliterated. When, therefore, she saw her mother once more reconciled to the presence of their guest, and willing that one so mournfully connected with their fate in life, and so strangely brought to them, should not wander off for ever thus forlorn and despairing, her soul rejoiced within her, the former brightness of her visage was restored, and once more the smile was seen that mantles from a heart made happy, without and almost against its will, in the power of its purity and innocence.

As they walked back through Glen-Creran to the old mansion, the character of the weather—of the scenery—of the day, seemed to them all to have undergone a change. A more sober music was in the rills; the sky was not so dazzlingly clear; a dim shadow crept over the sweet Loch-Phoil—and, as if a hawk had been in the air, the voice of every bird was silent in the woods. Few words were uttered, but these few became always less and less unhappy; and, as the lady and her daughter once more welcomed the English guest beneath their gate, it was with a profound feeling, in which aversion, dislike, or repugnance had no share—all these had vanished—although, when they sat down together in the parlour, there was first an utter silence, and then several sobs and a gush of tears. A few hours ago he was an interesting stranger about to pass away into oblivion—now he was one whom they could never forget—and whom they both felt must be for ever regarded by them, now that the first startling agony was over, with affection for his own sake, with pity for his misfortune, and with sympathy for the contrition which he endured for an act which he, more than themselves or others, regarded as a heinous crime.

The mother and daughter retired to their own room early in the evening, and Edward Ashton was left to his own thoughts. He went out into the glen, and walked about the beautiful calm woods till his soul was soothed with the untroubled solitude. He had seen those whom in all the world he had most feared ever to see—and gentle looks and kind words had flowed mutually from each other's hearts. They were both perfectly happy—their grief had passed away—and he began to hope, that, after his long penance, for him too there was to be peace. Across all these thoughts came insensibly the image of sweet Mary Stuart, and he almost ventured to ask himself, "Does she love any one—or has her gentle heart been left to itself in her native solitude?" This was a passing dream—but it passed away only to return; and when he met her again, just as the heavens were beginning to show their stars, he felt towards her an affection so tender and profound, that he wondered

how a day could have produced it; but then he considered what a day that had been, and he wondered no more.

All the domestics now came into the room, some of them old grey-haired people, who had been faithful servants to several generations, and Mary Stuart read to them several chapters from the Bible. It was a calm and happy scene; and, as a halo in old pictures is drawn round the heads of saints, it might well seem to him who looked on her, and listened to her gentle voice, that a halo now encircled the fair temples of Mary Stuart, as they bent down with their clustering ringlets over the Word of God.

His thoughts, during the wild solitude of the night before, had been many, and almost all pleasant, for he had lain in a chamber within an old Tower of the Mansion, like an adventurer of the days of old in the Land of Faëry; but during this night they were all most solemn under the weight of mere humanity, and while his fancy slept, it may be said that his heart was broad awake. His hand had deprived that mother of her only son—that sweet maiden of her only brother—and might it not be in his power to supply to each her separate loss? His own heart had hitherto conceived no deep affection—but had loved phantoms alone of its own creation. He had led a wandering, restless, and wretched life, for several years; and now, when the light of joy seemed to be breaking from a distance, like the far-off and faint streak of the doubtful dawn, his spirit expanded within him, and he dared to look forward to a bright futurity. Had not that fatal quarrel been forced upon him by the impetuous character of his antagonist? Had he not received from him perfect forgiveness, and manly acknowledgment of his courage and his honour? None reproached him for a quarrel that had not been of his own seeking, and he had long used his skill for the defence only of his own life. But two accomplished swordsmen had held each other at the point, and the young Highland chieftain had received his death-wound. This night was as still and breathless as the preceding night had been loud and stormy; and so, in some measure, was it with the heart of Edward Ashton. His thoughts, and feelings, and passions had worked themselves to rest—a tranquillity, to which he had too long been a stranger, took possession of his mind, and in the morning he cast a rejoicing look over the awakened beauty and magnificence of nature.

The Lady, in whose hospitable house he slept, had thought all night long alternately of him and of her son. The melancholy life he had for some years been leading in his solitary wanderings, touched her heart with the profoundest pity, and she wondered if his parents were dead, or if he had a father or a mother, who suffered him thus to cherish his unwitnessed and unparticipated grief. Many a one who had been involved in the same fatality easily and soon forgot it, and led the same cheerful or careless life as before, without blame from others, or remorse of their own consciences; but his whole youth was tinged with sadness, and the solemnity of age was affectingly blended with the natural candour of his prime. How was it possible to refuse affection to such a man? And her last thought, before sink-

ing into the world of dreams, was that her son had expired with a cold hand clasped in his, and with his head on a pillow which his care had smoothed.

As for Mary Stuart, when she "lay down in her loveliness," she tried to banish from her closed eyes the image of the stranger. Yet why should she not think of him? What was he—or could be to her, but one who, when far away, would remember her in sorrow, as the sister of the man whose death lay heavy on his soul? She felt the tears on her cheek, and wiped them away in the silent darkness; once more she prayed that God would send peace to his heart; and when the touch of the morning light awakened her from disturbed sleep, to him her earliest thought unconsciously turned, and he was not forgotten in her orisons.

The rich and cheerful beauty of the early autumn covered all the glen—and it was not easy for the wanderer to leave the heaven that to him lay both within and without the house. Sometimes he ascended by himself to the mountain-tops, and waited till the wreathed mist rose up in the early sunlight, and revealed far below the motionless silence of the wooded glen. He sat alone by the mountain cataracts, and traversed the heathery shores of the great wide inland lochs, or the rocky margin of arms of the sea. Valleys that stretched off into the dim and distant day shortened beneath his feet; and he enjoyed the stern silence of the black pine forest, darkening for leagues the base of some mighty mountain. The belling of the red deer came to him in the desert, as the echo of his footsteps roused up their antlered heads; and he strained his eyes to catch a sight of the eagle whose wild shriek he heard in the blue hollow of the sky. These were his day's wild penance in the uncompanioned solitude of nature. But hours of a sweet and human happiness were now often his; for he walked with fair Mary Stuart alone, or with her mother, through coverts by the streamlet's bank—along green meadow fields—glades where the young fawn might be seen at play—and into cottages where many a blythe and weatherbeaten face welcomed the visits of them whose visits were ever of kindness, charity, or love.

Thus day after day passed along, and still Edward Ashton was in Glen-Creran. He had narrated all the circumstances of her son's death to the mother—and she felt, too truly, that her wild and headstrong Charles had sought his doom! But not the less on that account did her maternal heart weep blessings on her dead son, while it yearned with indescribable emotions of tenderness and pity towards him who did justice to all his virtues, and who was willing to let all blame rest on his own head, rather than that any of it should alight on him who was in his grave. "O, sir—if my dear Charles and you had met as friends, well would you have loved one another! Had he been alive now—and you had come here an unconnected stranger, you would have crossed the moors and mountains together after the roe or the red deer. But his life has passed away, even as that shadow that is now passing over into Glenco—See, it is gone!"

They were sitting alone in the woods—no living thing near them but the squirrel leaping from tree to tree—no sound but that of the

cushat mixing with the murmur of the waterfall. Edward Ashton looked steadfastly in her face, and said: "Why am I lingering here? —need I say it? Your daughter Mary I do most tenderly love; if I can gain her affection, could you bear to look on me as your son-in-law? If not, I will leave Glen-Creran to-night." He spoke with great emotion, although suppressed; for to be pitied, and even esteemed, was still far different indeed from being received as a son into the bosom of a family whose dearest peace he had been the means of breaking. He waited in terror for the first words of the reply, and they at once raised up his soul into a heaven of joy. "If I saw you married to my Mary, then could I lay down my head and die in peace. I feel as if God had sent you here to be our comforter." His soul was satisfied, and he gave a history of himself and his family—telling how he had changed his name for that of a kinsman, to whose estate he had succeeded. "England is the country where I ought to live—but if your sweet daughter can be won, every year will we visit Glen-Creran. But, alas! all my hopes are but a dream. She never can be made to love me!" The lady looked upon him with a pleasant countenance, and an encouraging smile. "My daughter's heart is free—and it is impossible but that she must soon love you." They rose up, and returned in silence to the house.

That evening Edward Ashton and Mary Stuart walked up the wild and lonely Glenure, and before they reached home, there was a clear moon to light them through the fragrant birchwoods. Her heart was given up entirely, with all its calm, pure, and innocent thoughts and feelings, to him who was now her lover; it knew no disguise, nor had it one single emotion to veil or conceal. No passion agitated sweet Mary Stuart, no wild dreams of imagination, no enthusiastic transports of the fancy; but his smile was light, and his voice was music to her soul; and in the serene depth of an affection which had been growing within her heart, even from the very first moment she beheld the stranger in the Pine Grove, would she now have willingly gone with him to the uttermost parts of the earth, or laid down her young and happy life for his sake. When he folded her to his heart, as they mutually pledged their faith, her tears fell down in showers, and the kisses that then touched her eyes and cheek thrilled with unutterable happiness through her innocent and virgin heart. But dear to her as he then was, she felt, when about to part from him in a few days afterwards, that he was then far dearer; she then thought of being his wife in a vision of delight, for she was now deeply in love; and her soul sickened as the shadow fell on the sundial in the garden, that told the hour was come in which he must take his departure, for some months, from Glen-Creran.

Mary Stuart, except the year she had lived abroad with her mother after her brother's death, had led a solitary life in the Highlands. Her heart had slept in peaceful dreams, and had been as undisturbed as that of a child. But now it was overflowing with a pure passion, and her eyes beheld no longer the shadows and mists of her native mountains, her ears heard no longer the murmurs of her native stream. Edward Ashton was now to her all in all—and her former

life, happy as she had thought it, seemed now a vapid and empty dream.

The sun was high in heaven, and with his full radiance smote the distant clouds that were dissolving into a gentle shower, over the woody termination of the glen. "What a beautiful rainbow!" said Mary Stuart, with the tears in her eye—as her lover kissed them off, about to say farewell. "A rainbow brought me here, and as I am going away, lo! again shines in all its beauty the fair arch of promise!" These were his last words at parting, and they were remembered by Mary Stuart, and often repeated by her as she wandered through the solitary woods, thinking on her betrothed Edward. The hours, though they seemed to linger cruelly, at last had chased one another down the channel of time, like the waters of a changeful rivulet; and the morning of Mary Stuart's wedding-day shone over Glen-Creran. A happy day it was all among the mountains of Appin, and also over the beautiful Vale of Lorton in England, where, between their Christmas carols, many a cup went round, among his tenantry, to the young Squire and his Scottish Bride.

THE OMEN.

There was a cheerful and even noisy evening party in the parlour of Crofthead, the humble residence of a Scottish Laird, who inherited a small estate from a long line of obscure ancestors. The family consisted of himself, wife, and only daughter, and about half-a-dozen servants belonging to the house, the dairy, and the farm. A good many neighbours had now been gathered together at a tea-drinking; and the table, on this occasion, exhibited various other liquids, in tall green bottles, and creaked on its old legs under the weight of a world of viands. Not a few pretty girls and good-looking young men were judiciously distributed round the board; and from the frequent titterings and occasional hearty bursts of laughter, it could not be doubted that much delicate wit and no little broad humour were sported during the festive hour. The young ladies from the manse were in excellent spirits, and the comely daughters of Mr M'Fadyen, a retired Glasgow manufacturer, lent themselves both to the jammed cookies and the jocularity of the evening with even more than their usual animation. But though she was somewhat more silent than her wont, and had even a slight shade of sadness on her face not quite congenial with the scene of merriment, not one of them all looked so well as the daughter of the good old people; and her simply braided auburn hair, with no other ornament than a pink ribbon, had an appearance that might well be called elegant, when gently moving among the richly adorned love-locks and ringlets that waved so seducingly round the brows and cheeks of the other more ambitious and unmerciful young ladies. There was not one in the whole parish, high or low, rich or poor, that could for a moment be

compared with "sweet Jane Nasmyth;" this was so universally allowed, that she had even no rivals; and indeed had her beauty excited the envy of her companions, her unpretending manners, and the simplicity of her whole character, would have extinguished that feeling, and converted it into willing admiration and affectionate regard. "Sweet Jane Nasmyth" she was always called; and that expression, although at first hearing it may not seem to denote much, was indeed just the one she deserved in her loveliness that courted not the eyes which it won, and in her goodness which flowed on uninterruptedly in its own calm and unconscious course of home-born happiness.

It was now a beautiful moonlight night, and Jane Nasmyth contrived to leave the merry party, whether unobserved or not is uncertain, and glide away through the budding lilacs into a small arbour in the garden. It could not be supposed that she went there to sit alone and read the stars; a friend joined her in the bower, and she allowed herself to be taken into his bosom. For two years had she been tenderly and truly beloved by Arthur Crawfurd, a young man of an ancient but decayed family, and now a Lieutenant in the Navy. He was to join his ship next day—and as the frigate to which he belonged had a fighting character, poor Jane, although it was not the first time she had parted from him, was now, more than she had ever been, depressed and disturbed. The din of merriment came from the bright uncurtained windows of the Cottage-parlour to the lovers in their arbour; and the Sailor gaily said, "How could you leave so joyful a party to come and weep here?" In a few minutes Jane Nasmyth dried her tears; for she was not one who gave way needlessly to desponding thoughts; and the manly tenderness and respectful affection of her lover restored her heart almost to its usual serenity, so that they were both again quite cheerful and happy. He had often sailed away, and often returned; he had been spared both in battle and in shipwreck; and while that remembrance comforted her heart, it need not be said that it likewise sent through all its strings a vibration of more thrilling and profounder love.

It was a mild night in spring, and the leaves yet upfolded might almost be heard budding in the bower, as the dews descended upon them with genial influence. A slight twittering of the birds in their new-built nests was audible, as if the happy creatures were lying awake in the bright breathless night; and here and there a moth that enjoys the darkened light, went by on its noiseless wings. All was serenity and peace below, and not a stain was round the moon—no dimness over the stars.

"We shall have fair weather for a fortnight at least, Jane, for there is no halo yonder;" and as she looked up at these words, her head continued to rest upon her sailor's bosom. To think on waves and storms at such a moment was natural, but to fear them was impossible; her soul was strong in the undisturbed quiet of nature, and all her accustomed feelings of trust in Providence now gathered upon it, and she knew her sailor would return well and happy to her arms—and that she would then become his wife.

"I will cut two little branches off this Rose-tree, and plant them side by side on yonder bank that first catches the morning light. Look at them, now and then, when I am away, and let them be even, as ourselves, united where they grow." The cuttings from the Rose-bush were accordingly placed in the ground. Nor did these Lovers think, that in this half playful, half serious mood, there was anything foolish in persons at their time of life. To be sure they were rather too old for such trifling; for Arthur was twenty-two years of age, and Jane wanted but a few months of nineteen. But we all become wiser as we get old; and perhaps the time came when these rose-plants were suffered to blossom unheeded, and to cover the ground about them with a snow-shower of fragrance, enjoyed only by the working-bees. At present they were put into the mould as carefully as if on their lives had depended the lives of those who planted them; and Jane watered them, unnecessarily, in a vernal night of dew, with a shower of tears. "If they grow, bud, and blossom, that will be a good OMEN—if not, I must not allow myself to have any foolish fears!"

The parting kiss was given, and the last mutual benedictions, and then Arthur Crawfurd, clearing his voice, said, "I hear the fun and frolic is not yet over, nor likely to be so soon. Why don't you ask me to join the party?" It was well known that they were betrothed, and that the marriage was to take place on his return from this cruise, so, with a blush, Jane introduced him into the parlour. "I presume, Lieutenant," said one, "you have come here in a balloon?"

"Well, Jane," said another, "I declare that I never missed you out of the room;—were you giving orders about supper—or have you been in the garden to see if the cresses are fit to be cut?"

The sailor was, during this time, shaking the old man by the hand so firmly, that the water stood in his eyes, and he exclaimed, "Why, Arthur, your fist is like a vice. It would not do for you to shake hands with any of the young lasses there—you would make the blood tingle in their fingers. Sit down, my dear son, and while the younkers are busy among themselves, let us hear what the French and Spaniards are about, and if it be true that Lord Nelson is going to give them a settling again." So passed the evening by—charades and songs lent their aid, and after a breaking up of the party, which lasted about half an hour in finding and fitting on straw bonnets, shawls, and shoes, the laughter and voices of one and all, as they receded from the cottage up the hill, or down the vale, died away, and Crofthead was buried in silence and in sleep.

Days and weeks passed on, while Jane Nasmyth sat in her cottage, or walked about the adjacent fields, and her lover was sailing far and wide upon the seas. There were many rumours of an expected engagement, and her heart fluttered at the sight of every stranger. But her lover's letters came, if not regularly, yet in pleasant numbers, and their glad and cheerful tone infused confidence into her heart. When he was last away, they were lovers; but now their marriage was fixed, and his letters now were written as to his bride, overflowing with gratitude and delighted affection. When she was reading

them, he seemed to be talking before her—the great distance of land and sea between them vanished—and as he spoke of his ship of which he was so proud, she almost expected, on lifting up her eyes, to see its masts towering up before her, with all their glorious flags and ensigns. But they were streaming to the wind above the foam of the ocean, and her eyes saw only the green shade of the sheltering Sycamore—her ears heard only the deep murmur of the working-bees, as if a whole hive had been in that tentlike Tree.

Nor did Jane Nasmyth forget to visit, many times every day, the two roses which her lover had planted, and to which he had told her to look as an OMEN of his state when far at sea. To the bank on which they grew she paid her earliest visit along with the beams of the morning sun; and there, too, she marked the first diamonds of the evening dew. They grew to her heart's desire; and now that the year was advanced, they showed a few flower buds, and seemed about to break out into roses, slender as were their bending stems. That one which bore her lover's name hung over her own, as if sheltering it with its flexile arch, and when weighed down by the rain-drops, or by the breeze, it touched gently the leaves of its companion, and seemed to intertwine with it in a balmy embrace. The heart can accumulate love and delight upon any object whatever; but these plants were in themselves beautiful, and every leaf swarmed, not with poetic visions, but with thoughts of such deep human tenderness, that they were seldom looked at without a gush of tears. They were perfectly unlike all the other shrubs and flowers in that garden; and had they been dug up it would have been felt as sacrilege; had they withered the OMEN would have struck through her very life. But they did not wither; and nothing touched them but the bee or the butterfly, or haply for a moment the green linnet, the chaffinch, or the red-cap, half balanced on the bending spray, and half supported by his fluttering wings.

Crofthead was a cottage in a sheltered vale—but it was not far inland, and by ascending a green hill behind it, Jane Nasmyth could, on clear days, get a glimpse of the blue ocean. The sight even of the element on which her lover now dwelt was delightful to her eyes, and if a white sail shone forth through the sunlight, her heart felt a touch of dear emotion. Sometimes, too, when walking in the vale, she would gaze with love on the beautiful white sea-mew, that came floating on the sea-born air into the fields of the quiet earth. As the creature alighted on the green turf, and folding its wings, sat there motionless, or walked as if pleased with the soft pressure of the grass beneath its feet, she viewed it as a silent messenger from the sea, that perhaps might have flown round her lover's ship. Its soft plumes bore no marks of the dashing waves; its eyes, although wild, were gentle; its movement was calm, as if it had never drifted with the rapid tides, or been driven through the howling tempest; and as it again rose up from the herbage and the wild-flowers, and hovering over her head for a little while, winged its way down the vale over the peaceful woods, she sent her whole soul with it to the ocean, and heaved a deep sigh unconsciously as it disappeared.

The summer was now over, and the autumn at hand. The hay-fields were once more green with springing herbage—and bands of reapers were waiting for a few sunny days till they might be let loose in joyful labour upon the ripened grain. Was the Amethyst frigate never to finish her cruise? September surely would not pass away without seeing her in harbour, and Arthur Crawfurd at Crofthead. Poor Jane was beginning to pine now for her lover's return; and one afternoon, on visiting, almost unhappy, the Rose-trees, she thought that they both were drooping. She forgot that September mornings have often their frost in Scotland; and on seeing a few withered leaves near the now wasted blossoms, she remembered Arthur's words about the OMEN, and turned away from the bank with a shudder of foolish fear. But a trifle will agitate a wiser and older heart than that of Jane Nasmyth, and reason neither awakens nor lulls to sleep the passions of human beings, which obey, in the darkness of their mystery, many unknown and incomprehensible laws. "What if he be dead!" thought she, with a sick pang tugging at her heart—and she hastened out of the garden, as if a beast of prey had been seen by her, or an adder lying couched among the bushes.

She entered the house in a sort of panic, of which she was ashamed as soon as she saw the cheerful and happy faces of her parents, who were sitting together listening, according to their usual custom, to an old spectacled neighbour busy at a newspaper, the Edinburgh Evening Courant, a copy of which made visits to about a dozen of the most respectable families in the parish. The old worthy was Emeritus Schoolmaster, and was justly proud of his elocution, which was distinct and precise, each syllable being made to stand well out by itself, while it was generally admitted that Mr Peacock had a good deal of the English accent, which he had acquired about forty years ago at Inverness. He did not think it worth while to stop very long at the end of a paragraph, or article, but went on in a good business-like style, right through politics, stocks, extraordinary accidents, state of the weather, births, deaths, and marriages, a pleasing and instructive medley. Just as Jane had taken her seat, the good old proser had got to ship-news, and he announced, without being in the least aware of what he was about, "FOUNDERED IN THE LATE TREMENDOUS GALE, OFF THE LIZARD, HIS MAJESTY'S FRIGATE AMETHYST. ALL THE CREW PERISHED!"

After the first shock of horror, the old people rose from their seats and tried to lift up their daughter, who had fallen down, as if stone-dead, with great violence on the floor. The schoolmaster, petrified and rooted to his chair, struck his forehead in agony, and could only ejaculate—"God forgive me—God forgive me!" After many long-drawn sighs, and many alarming relapses into that deadly swoon, Jane opened her eyes, and looking round with a ghastly wildness, saw the newspaper lying on the floor where it had dropped from the old man's trembling hands. Crawling with a livid face towards the object of her horror, she clutched it convulsively with her feeble fingers, and, with glazed eyes, instinctively seizing on the spot, she

read, as if to herself, the dreadful words over and over again—and then, as if her intellect was affected, kept repeating a few of them: "Foundered"—"Tremendous gale"—"Every soul perished." "Oh! great and dreadful God—my Arthur is drowned at last!"

Some of the kind domestics now came into the room, and with their care—for their parents were nearly helpless—the poor girl was restored to her senses. She alone wept not—for her heart was hardened, and she felt a band of cold iron drawn tight round her bosom. There was weeping and sobbing, loud and unrestrained, with all others; for Arthur Crawfurd, the beautiful and brave, was beloved by every one in the parish, from the child of six years to old people of fourscore. Several young men, too, belonging to the parish, had served on board that ship, and they were not now forgotten, although it was for the young lieutenant, more than for them of their own rank, that now all the servants wept.

Jane Nasmyth was a maiden of a perfectly pious mind; but no piety can prevent nature from shrieking aloud at the first blow of a great calamity. She wished herself dead—and that wish she expressed as she found her voice. Her old father knelt down on the floor at one side of his child, and her old mother at another, while the latter had just strength to say—"Our Father which art in heaven—hallowed be Thy name—Thy kingdom come—Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The poor girl shut her eyes with a groan; but she could not repeat a single one of these words. Then was the floor, indeed, drenched with tears. They fell down in big drops—in plashing showers from old eyes, that had not seemed before to contain so much moisture. And in that mortal silence no sound was now heard but one low quivering voice, saying at intervals—"All the crew perished—all the crew perished! Woe is me—woe is me—Arthur is drowned at last!"

They lifted her from the floor—and, to her own wonder, she fell not down, but could stand unsupported on her feet. "Take me upstairs to my bed, mother—let me lie down there—and perhaps I may be better. I said that I wished to die. Oh! these were wicked words. May I live to do my duty to my dear parents in their old age. But, oh! this sickness is mortal—mortal indeed. But let me put my trust in God and my Redeemer, and pray to them—my parents—to forgive my impious words!"

They supported her steps—and she asked to go to the window just to take one look out into the calm and beautiful afternoon—for not a breath was stirring—and the western sun diffused over the scene a bright but softened repose. "Oh, merciful God!—there is Arthur's ghost—I saw it pass by—it waved its hand—bright and smiling were its eyes—take me away—take me away, for I feel that visions beset my brain!" They half lifted her in their arms towards the door—while she continued to say, faintly, "It smiled—yes, it smiled—but Arthur's body is mangled, and bruised, and crushed by timber, and stones, and rocks—lying on the sand somewhere, while I was singing or laughing in my miserable delusion—his face

gnawed by sea-monsters!" and then her voice was choked, and she could speak no more.

The door burst open; and there entered no ghost, but the bold, glad, joyful, living sailor himself, who clasped Jane to his bosom. So sudden was his entrance, that he had not time to observe the dismay and grief that had been trampling on all now beside him—nor did he, during that blest embrace, feel that his betrothed maiden was insensible to his endearments. Joy had taken possession of all his being—all his perceptions; and he saw nothing—felt nothing—but his Jane and her bosom pressed closely to his own. "Have I broken in upon a dish of gossip?—Well, no rival in the room—so far good. What, all silent—pale faces—tears—what is the matter? Is this a welcome?"

But so many death-like or agitated countenances soon told him that some strong passion pervaded the party—and he began to have his own undefined fears—for he had not yet visited his own father's house. All was soon explained; and Jane having been revived into tolerable composure, the servants retired, but not before shaking hands, one and all, with the Lieutenant: and the old Schoolmaster, too, who felt himself to blame, although sent for on purpose to read aloud the news, and certainly not answerable for erroneous nautical intelligence, feeling rather uneasy in the room, promised to call next evening, took up his old-fashioned chapeau, and making a bow worthy of a distinguished pedagogue, made the best of his way out and beyond the premises.

Arthur Crawfurd, coming in upon them in the transport of his joy, could not easily bring home to his heart a perfect understanding of the scene that had just preceded his arrival. He never perhaps knew the full terror that had nearly deprived his sweet Jane of life; but he knew enough to lay an eternal obligation of tenderness towards her upon his inmost soul.

"Instead of foundering, the Amethyst is in as good trim as any frigate in the fleet; but she had to send for some leagues under bare poles, for the squall came upon us like a sheet of iron. A large ship, name unknown, went down near our stern."

"And all on board perished!" exclaimed Jane, in a dewy voice of pity.

"They did indeed!"

"Oh! many eyes now are weeping, or doomed to weep, for that ship, while mine are dried. Her name will be known soon enough!"

And, as she looked on her lover, once more did the maiden give way to the strong imagination of the doom which she felt he had narrowly escaped.

"Come, cheer up, Jane—my life is in God's hand; and with Him it rests, whether I die on my bed in the cottage at last, or, like many a better man, in battle or wreck. But you are willing to marry a sailor—for better or worse—a longer or shorter date—and no doubt I shall be as happy as any of my messmates. Not one of them all has such a sweetheart as thou art—a dutiful daughter makes a loving wife."

After an hour's talk and silence, during which Jane Nasmyth had scarcely recovered from a slight hysteric, her father proposed returning thanks to God for Arthur's return. The sailor was a man of gay and joyous character, but in religion he was not only a firm but impassioned believer. He had not allowed the temptations of a life, which with too many is often wild and dissipated, to shake his faith in Christianity; the many hardships and dangers which he had encountered and escaped had served to deepen all his religious impressions; so that a weak person would have called him methodistical or superstitious. He was neither; but he had heard God in the great deep, and he did not forget the voice in the silence of the green and steadfast earth. So he knelt down to prayer with a humble and grateful spirit, and as he felt his own Jane breathing by his side, on her knees, and knew that she was at the same time weeping for joy at his return, neither was he ashamed also to weep; for there are times, and this was one of them, when a brave man need not seek to hide his tears either before his fellow-creatures or his Creator.

After they had risen from their fervent prayer, and a short silent pause had ensued, "How," said the sailor, "are our two Rose-bushes? Did they hang their heads, do you think, because false rumour sank the good ship Amethyst? Come, Jane, let us go and see." And as some hundreds of swallows were twittering on the house-top in the evening sunshine, collected there with a view either of flying across seas to some distant country, or of plunging down to the bottom of some loch near at hand (probably the former), the lovers walked out into the open air—unlatched the little white gate canopied with an arch of honeysuckle, that guarded a garden into which there were no intruders, and arm-in-arm proceeded to the "Bank of the Two Roses." They had nothing now of that sickly and dying appearance which they had showed to Jane's eyes a few hours ago; no evil OMEN was there now—but they seemed likely to live for many years, and every season to put forth their flowers in greater number and in richer beauty.

CONSUMPTION.

THE Moss-Roses are still clustered in their undecaying splendour above the porch of Calder Cottage; the bees are murmuring in their joy around the hive on its greensward, rich with its white and purple clover; the turtle-doves are cooing on the roof, with plumage brightening in the sunshine; while over all is shed a dim and tender shadow from the embowering Sycamore, beneath whose shelter was built, many long years ago, the little humble edifice. In its low simplicity it might be the dwelling of the poor; but the heart feels something in its quiet loveliness that breathes of the spirit of cultivated life. A finer character of beauty pervades the still seclusion,

than the hand of labour ever shed over its dwelling in the gratitude of its Sabbath hours; all around seems ministering to the joy, and not to the necessities of existence; and as the eye dwells on the gorgeous ornaments which sun, and air, and dew have showered in profusion over the blooming walls, the mind cannot but think of some delicate and gentle spirit retired from the world it had adorned, and enjoying in the twilight of life the sweetness and serenity of nature.

Such were its inmates a few short months ago. The sound of music was heard far down the romantic banks of the Calder, when, in the silence of the evening, the harp was touched within these humble walls, or there arose a mingled voice as of spirits hymning through the woods. But the strings of the harp are now silent, and the young lips that sang those heavenly anthems are covered with the dust.

The lady who lived there in her widowhood was sprung of gentle blood; and none who had but for a moment looked on her pale countenance, and her figure majestic even under the burden of pain, could ever again forget that image, at once so solemn and so beautiful. Although no deep lines disturbed the meek expression of that fading face, and something that almost seemed a smile still shone over her placid features, yet had that lady undergone in her day hardships, and troubles, and calamities that might have broken the heart, and laid low the head of manhood in its sternest pride. She had been with her husband in famine, battle, and shipwreck. When his mortal wound came, she sat by his bedside—her hand closed his eyes and wrought his shroud; and she was able to gaze with a steadfast eye on all the troops marching with reversed arms, and with slow step, to melancholy music, when the whole army was drawn up at his funeral on the field of battle. Perhaps, then, she wished to die. But two children were at her knees, and another at her bosom; and on her return to her native country, she found heart to walk through the very scenes where she had been most blessed before these infants were born, and to live in the very dwelling to which he who was now buried had brought her a young and happy bride. Such had been his last request; and seventeen years of resignation and peace had now passed over the head of the widow—whose soul was with her husband at morning and at evening prayers—during hours of the day when there were many present—and during hours of the night when there were none but the eye of God to witness her uncomplaining melancholy. Her grief was calm, but it was constant—it repined not, but it wasted away; and though all called her happy, all knew that her life was frail, and that one so sad and sorrowful even in her happiness was not destined by God for old age. Yet for her none felt pity—a higher feeling arose in every heart from the resignation so perfectly expressed in every motion, look, and tone; and beautiful as she was on earth, there came across the souls of all who beheld her a thought of one yet more beautiful in heaven.

Her three daughters, although their health had always been deli-

cate, were well, cheerful, and happy ; but some said, that whenever they were met walking alone, a solemn, if not a mournful expression was on their countenances ; and whether it was so or not, they certainly shunned society rather than sought it, and seldom partook of the innocent amusements natural to youth, and to which youth lends so much grace and attraction. No one ever saw any of them unamiable, or averse from the gladness of others ; but a shade of sadness was now perceptible over all their demeanour, and they seemed bound together by some tie even more strict than that of sisterly affection. The truth was, that they felt God had given them but a short life, and that when the bier of one was carried into the churchyard, that of the other would not be long of following it to the place of rest.

Their mother died first, and her death had been long foreseen by them ; for they, who spoke together of their own deaths, were not likely to deceive themselves with respect to that of one so dear to them all. She was ready and willing to die ; but tears were on her cheek only a few hours before her decease, for the sake of her three daughters, left to themselves, and to drop away, as she well knew, one after the other, in that fatal disease which they inherited from their father. Her death was peaceful—almost happy ; but, resigned as she was, it could not but be afflicting to her parting spirit to see those three beautiful spectres gliding round her bedside, with countenances and persons that plainly told they were fast hastening on to the tomb.

The funeral of the mother was conducted as it deserved to be—for humble as she was in heart, yet she had been highly born ; and many attended her body to the grave who had almost forgotten her when alive in her simple retirement. But these were worldly mourners, who laid aside their sorrow with their suits of sable. Many who had no right to walk near her coffin felt they had a right to weep over her grave ; and for many Sabbaths after her burial, groups collected beside the mound ; and while many of them could not but weep, none left it without a sigh and a blessing. When her three daughters, after the intermission of a few Sabbaths, were again seen walking, arm-in-arm, into the church, and taking their seats in their own pew, the whole congregation may be said to have regarded the Orphans with a compassion, which was heightened into an emotion at once overcoming and consoling, when it was visible to all who looked upon them, that erelong they would be lying side by side near their Mother's grave.

After her death, the three Orphans were seldomer seen than before ; and, pale as their sweet faces had seemed when they used to dress in white, they seemed even paler now contrasted with their black mourning garments. They received the visits of their few dear friends with warmest gratitude, and those of ordinary condolement with a placid content ; they did not appear wearied of this world, but resigned to leave it ; smiles and the pressure of affectionate hands were still dear to them ; and if they kept themselves apart from society, it was not because they could not sympa-

thise with its hilarity, its amusements, and its mirth, but because they were warned by feelings close upon their brain and heart, and they were doomed soon to lay their heads down into the dust. Some visitors, on first entering their parlour, in which everything was still as elegantly and gracefully arranged as ever, wondered why the fair Sisters should so seldom be seen out of their own dwelling; but not one, even the most thoughtless and unfeeling, ever left them without far different thoughts, or without a sorrowful conviction that they were passing, in perfect resignation, the remainder of their life, which, in their own hearts they knew to be small. So, week after week, visits of idle ceremony were discontinued; and none now came to Calder Cottage except those who had been dear to their dead Mother, and were dear, even for that reason, had there been no other, to the dying Orphans.

They sat in their beauty within the shadow of death. But happiness was not therefore excluded from Calder Cottage. It was even a sublime satisfaction to know that God was to call them away from their mortal being unsevered; and that while they all three knelt in prayer, it was not for the sake of one only who was to leave the survivors in tears, but for themselves that they were mutually beseeching God, that he would be pleased to smooth the path by which they were walking hand and hand to the grave. When the sun shone, they still continued to wander along the shaded banks of their beloved Calder, and admire its quiet junction with the wide-flowing Clyde. They did not neglect their flower-garden, although they well knew that their eyes were not to be gladdened by the blossoms of another Spring. They strewed, as before, crumbs for the small birds that had built their nests among the roses and honeysuckles on the wall of their cottage. They kept the weeds from overgrowing the walks that were soon to be trodden by their feet no more; and they did not turn their eyes away from the shooting flowers which they knew took another spring to bring them to maturity, and would be disclosing their fragrant beauty in the sunshine that shone on their own graves. Nor did their higher cares lose any of the interest or the charm which they had possessed during their years of health and hope. The old people whom their charity supported were received with as kind smiles as ever, when they came to receive their weekly dole. The children whom they clothed and sent to school met with the same sweet voices as before, when on the Saturday evenings they visited the ladies of Calder Cottage; and the innocent mirth of all about the house, the garden, the fields, or the adjacent huts, seemed to be pleasant to their ears, when stealing unexpectedly upon them from happy persons engrossed with their own joys, and unaware that the sound of their pastimes had reached those whose own earthly enjoyments were so near a close.

These were the last lingering shadows and sounds and odours of life; and the time had not yet come upon either of these Orphans when they could not be enjoyed. But they had other comforts; and if it had been ever most delightful to them to read and study

the Word of God, when they let fall upon the holy page eyes bright with the dewy light of health yet undecaying, it was now more than delightful—it was blessed—to peruse it now together, when they had to give the Bible by turns into each other's hands, that their eyesight might not get dim, nor their voice falter, which would have been, had the same dying Christian read aloud one chapter to the end. When the old minister visited them, he found them always cheerful and composed—during his stay they were even joyful in their resignation; and at parting, if tears were ever shed, it was by the aged for the young who wept not for themselves, except when they thought how that benign old man had stood by their mother's deathbed, and when she had lost her utterance, let her spirit ascend upon his prayers to heaven.

Caroline was the first to die. Her character, unlike that of both her sisters, had been distinguished by great spirit and vivacity; and when they were present, had always diffused something of its own glad light over the serene composure of the one, and the melancholy stillness of the other, without seeming ever to be inconsistent with them; nor did her natural and impressible buoyancy altogether forsake her even to the very last. With her the disease assumed its most beautiful show. Her light blue eyes sparkled with astonishing brilliancy—her cheeks, that had always hitherto been pale, glowed with a rose-like lustre. Although she knew that she was dying, and strove to subdue her soul down to her near fate, yet, in spite of herself, the strange fire that glowed in the embers of her life, kindled it often into a kind of airy gladness, so that a stranger would have thought her one on whom opening existence was just revealing the treasures of its joy, and who was eager to unfold her wings, and sail on into the calm and sunny future. Her soul, till within a few days of her death, was gay in the exhilaration of disease; and the very night before she died, she touched the harp with a playful hand, and warbled, as long as her strength would permit, a few bars of a romantic tune. No one was with her when she died, for she had risen earlier than her sisters, and was found by them, when they came down to the parlour, leaning back, with a smiling face, on the sofa, with a few lilies in her hand, and never more to have her head lifted up in life.

The youngest had gone first, and she was to be followed by Emma, the next in age. Emma, although so like her sister who was now dead, that they had always been thought by strangers to be Twins, had a character altogether different. Her thoughts and feelings ran in a deeper channel; nature had endowed her with extraordinary talents, and whatever she attempted, serious acquisition or light accomplishment, in that she easily excelled. Few, indeed, is the number of women that are eminently distinguished among their sex, and leave names to be enrolled in the lists of fame. Some accidental circumstances of life or death have favoured those few; and their sentiments, thoughts, feelings, fancies, and opinions, retain a permanent existence. But how many sink into the grave in all their personal beauty, and all their mental charms, and are heard of

no more! Of them no bright thoughts are recorded, no touching emotions, no wild imaginations. All their fine and true perceptions, all their instinctive knowledge of the human soul, and all their pure speculation on the mystery of human life, vanish for ever and aye with the parting breath. A fair, amiable, intelligent young maiden has died and is buried. That is all. And her grave lies in its unvisited rest. Such an one was Emma Beatoun. Her mother, her sisters, and a few dear friends, knew what treasures of thought were in her soul—what gleams of genius—and what light of unpretending wisdom. But she carried up her pure and high thoughts with her to heaven; nor did any of them survive her on earth, but a few fragments of hymns set by herself to plaintive music, which no voice but her own, so deep and yet so sweet, so mellow yet so mournful, could ever have fitly sung.

The sufferings of this Sister were heavy indeed, and she at last prayed to be relieved. Constant sickness, interrupted only by fits of racking pain, kept the fair shadow for the last weeks of her life to bed; and nothing seemed to disturb her so much as the incessant care of her dying sister, who seemed to forget her own approaching doom in the tenderest ministrations of love. Emma's religious thoughts had long been of an almost dark and awful character, and she was possessed by a deep sense of her own utter unworthiness in the sight of God. It was feared that, as her end drew near, and her mind was weakened by continual suffering, her last hours might be visited with visions too trying and terrible; but the reverse was the case; and it seemed as if God, to reward a life of meekness, humility, and wisdom, removed all fear from her soul, and showed her the loving, rather than the awful mysteries of her Redeemer. On her dead face there sat a smile, just as pleasant and serene as that which had lighted the countenance of Caroline, when she fell asleep for ever with the lilies in her hand. The old Nurse, who had been with them since their infancy, alone observed that she had expired; for there had been no sigh, and the pale emaciated fingers moved not as they lay clasped together across her breast.

Louisa, the eldest, was now left alone, and, although her health had always been the most delicate, there seemed, from some of the symptoms, a slight hope that she might yet recover. That fatal hectic flush did not stain her cheeks, and her pulse, although very faint, had not the irregularity of alarming fever. But there are secrets known but to the dying themselves; and all the encouraging kindness of friends was received by her as sweet proofs of affection, but never once touched her heart with hope. The disease of which both her sisters had died was in the blood of her father's family; and she never rose up from her bed, or her couch, or the grey osier-seat in the sunny garden, without feeling a deathlike lassitude that could not long endure. Indeed, she yearned for the grave; and hers was a weariness that could only find entire relief in the perfect stillness of that narrow house.

Had Louisa not felt death within her bosom, there were circumstances that could not have failed to make her desire life, even after

her Mother and Sisters had been taken away; for she had been betrothed, for a year past, to one who would have made her happy. He received an account of the alarming state of the sisters at Pisa, whither he had gone for the establishment of his own health, and he instantly hurried home to Scotland. Caroline and Emma were in their graves; but he had the mournful satisfaction to be with his own Louisa in her last days. Much did he, at first, press her to go to Italy, as a faint and forlorn hope; but he soon desisted from such vain persuasions. "The thought is sweet to lay our bones within the bosom of our native soil. The verdure and the flowers I loved will brighten around my grave—the same trees whose pleasant murmurs cheered my living ear, will hang their cool shadows over my dust—and the eyes that met mine in the light of affection will shed tears over the sod that covers me, keeping my memory green within their spirits!" He who had been her lover, but was now the friend and brother of her soul, had nothing to say in reply to these natural sentiments. "After all, they are but fancies, Henry, but they cling to the heart from which they sprung—and to be buried in the sweet churchyard of Blantyre is now a thought most pleasant to my soul."

In dry summer weather, a clear rivulet imperceptibly shrinks away from its sandy bed, till on some morning we miss the gleam and the murmur altogether, and find the little channel dry. Just in this way was Louisa wasting—and so was her life pure and beautiful to the last. The day before she died, she requested, in a voice that could not be denied, that her brother would take her into the churchyard, that she might see the graves of her mother and sisters all lying together, and the spot whose daisies were soon to be disturbed. She was carried thither in the sunshine on her sick chair, for the distance was only a very few hundred yards, and her attendants having withdrawn, she surveyed the graves with a beaming countenance, in presence of her weeping Friend. "Methinks," said she, "I hear a hymn—and children singing in the church! No—no—it is only the remembered sound of the psalm I heard the last Sabbath I had strength to go there. Oh! sweet was it now as the reality itself!" He who was to have been her husband was wholly overcome, and hid his face in despair. "I go—my beloved—to that holy place where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage; but we shall meet there, purified from every earthly stain. Dry up your tears and weep no more. Kiss—Oh kiss me once more before I die!" He stooped down, and she had just strength to put her arms round his neck, when, with a long sigh—she expired.

THE SHIELING.

An enormous thunder-cloud had lain all day over Ben-Nevis, shrouding its summit in thick darkness, blackening its sides and base, wherever they were beheld from the surrounding country, with masses of deep shadow, and especially flinging down a weight of gloom upon that magnificent glen that bears the same name with the Mountain, till now the afternoon was like twilight, and the voice of all the streams was distinct in the breathlessness of the vast solitary hollow. The inhabitants of all the straths, vales, glens, and dells, round and about the Monarch of Scottish mountains, had, during each successive hour, been expecting the roar of thunder and the deluge of rain; but the huge conglomeration of lowering clouds would not rend asunder, although it was certain that a calm blue sky could not be restored till all that dreadful assemblage had melted away into torrents, or been driven off by a strong wind from the sea. All the cattle on the hills, and on the hollows, stood still or lay down in their fear,—the wild-deer sought in herds the shelter of the pine-covered cliffs—the raven hushed his hoarse-croak in some green cavern, and the eagle left the dreadful silence of the upper heavens. Now and then the shepherds looked from their huts, while the shadow of the thunder-clouds deepened the hues of their plaids and tartans; and at every creaking of the heavy branches of the pines or wide-armed oaks, in the solitude of their inaccessible birthplace, the hearts of the lonely dwellers quaked, and they lifted up their eyes to see the first wide flash—the disparting of the masses of darkness—and paused to hear the long loud rattle of heaven's artillery shaking the foundation of the everlasting mountains. But all was yet silent.

The peal came at last, and it seemed as if an earthquake had smote the silence. Not a tree—not a blade of grass moved; but the blow stunned, as it were, the heart of the solid globe. Then was there a low, wild, whispering, wailing voice, as of many spirits all joining together from every point of heaven,—it died away—and then the rushing of rain was heard through the darkness; and, in a few minutes, down came all the mountain torrents in their power, and the sides of all the steeps were suddenly sheeted, far and wide, with waterfalls. The element of water was let loose to run its rejoicing race—and that of fire lent it illumination, whether sweeping in floods along the great open straths, or tumbling in cataracts from cliffs overhanging the eagle's eyrie.

Great rivers were suddenly flooded—and the little mountain rivulets, a few minutes before only silver threads, and in whose fairy basins the minnow played, were now scarcely fordable to shepherds' feet. It was time for the strongest to take shelter, and none now would have liked to issue from it; for while there was real danger to life and limb in the many raging torrents, and in the lightning's flash, the imagination and the soul themselves were touched with awe in the long resounding glens, and beneath the savage scowl of

the angry sky. It was such a storm as becomes an era among the mountains; and it was felt that before next morning there would be a loss of lives—not only among the beasts that perish, but among human beings overtaken by the wrath of that irresistible tempest.

It was not a time to be abroad; yet all by herself was hastening down Glen-Nevis, from a shieling far up the river, a little Girl, not more than twelve years of age—in truth a very child. Grief and fear, not for herself, but for another, bore her along as upon wings, through the storm; she crossed rivulets from which, on any other occasion, she would have turned back trembling; and she did not even hear many of the crashes of thunder that smote the smoking hills. Sometimes at a fiercer flash of lightning she just lifted her hand to her dazzled eyes, and then, unappalled, hurried on through the hot and sulphureous air. Had she been a maiden of that tender age from village or city, her course would soon have been fatally stopped short; but she had been born among the hills, had first learned to walk among the heather, holding by its blooming branches, and many and many a solitary mile had she tripped, young as she was, over moss and moor, glen and mountain, even like the roe that had its lair in the coppice beside her own beloved shieling.

She had now reached the gateway of the beautiful hereditary Mansion of the Camerons—and was passing by, when she was observed from the windows, and one of the shepherds, who had all come down from the mountain-heights, and were collected together (not without a quech of the mountain-dew, or water of life) in a large shed, was sent out to bring the poor girl instantly into the house. She was brought back almost by force, and then it was seen that she was in tears. Her sweet face was indeed all dripping with rain, but there was other moisture in her fair blue eyes; and when she was asked to tell her story, she could scarcely speak. At last she found voice to say, "that old Lewis Cameron, her grandfather, was dying—that he could scarcely speak when she left him in the shieling—and that she had been running as fast as she could to Fort-William for the Priest." "Come, my good little Flora, with me into the parlour—and one of the shepherds will go for Mr Macdonald; —you would be drowned in trying to cross that part of the road where the Nevis swirls over it out of the Salmon Pool—come and I will put some dry clothes on you—you are just about the size of my own Lilias." The child was ill to persuade—for she thought on the old man lying by himself in the shieling at the point of death; but when she saw one of the shepherds whom she knew setting off with rapid steps, her wild heart was appeased, and she endeavoured to dry up her tears. Nothing, however, could induce her to go into the parlour, or put on the young lady's clothes. She stood before the wide blazing peat and wood fire in the kitchen—and her spirits became a little better, when she had told her tale in Gaelic to so many people belonging to her own condition, and who all crowded round her with sympathising hearts, and fixed faces, to hear everything about poor old dying Lewis Cameron.

Old Lewis was well known all round the broad base of Ben-Nevis.

What his age was nobody precisely knew, but it was ascertained that he could not be under ninety—and many maintained that he had outlived an hundred years. He recollected the famous old Lochiel of the first Rebellion—had fought in the strength and prime of manhood at Culloden—and had charged the French on the heights of Abraham. He had ever since that battle been a pensioner; and although he had many wounds to show both of bullets and the bayonet, yet his iron frame had miraculously retained its strength, and his limbs much of their activity till the very last. His hair was like snow, but his face was ruddy still—and his large withered hand had still a grasp that could hold down the neck of the dying red-deer to the ground. He had lived for thirty years in a shieling built by himself among a wild heap of sheltering rocks, and for the last five his little orphan grand-daughter, the only one of his blood alive, had been his companion in his solitude. Old Lewis was the best angler in the Highlands, and he knew all the streams, rivers, and lochs. Many thousand grouse had tumbled on the heath beneath his unerring aim; and the roe was afraid to show her face out of a thicket. But the red-deer was his delight: he had been Keeper to Lochiel once—and many a long day, from sunrise to sunset, had he stalked like a shadow over ranges of mountains till he found himself at night far away from his shieling. He was a guide, too, to botanists, mineralogists, painters, poets, and prosers. Philosophers, men of science, lovers of the muse, hunters of the picturesque—men eager after parallel roads and vetrified forts, and town gentlemen sent from garrets to describe, for the delight and instruction of their fellow-citizens, the grand features of nature—all came right to old Lewis Cameron. Many a sweat did he give them, panting in pursuit of knowledge, over the large loose stones, and the pointed crags, and up to the middle in heather beneath the sultry sun, toiling up the perpendicular sides of hill and mountain. But, above all, he loved the young Sassenachs, when with their rifles they followed with him the red-deer over the bent, and were happy if, at nightfall, one pair of antlers lay motionless on the heather.

Such was old Lewis Cameron, who was now thought to be lying at the point of death. And it was not surprising that the shepherds now collected together during the storm, and indeed every person in the house felt a deep interest in the old man's fate. "Ay, his hour is come—his feet will never touch the living heather again!" was the expression in which they all joined. They did not fear to speak openly before little Flora, who was now standing beside the fire, with her long yellow hair let loose, and streaming all wet over her shoulders—for the death of the oldest man in all the glens was an event to be looked for, and the child knew as well as they did that her grandfather's hour was come. Many and many a time did she go to the window to look if the priest was coming up the glen; and at last she began to fear that the rain, and the wind, which was now beginning to rise after the hush of the thundery air, would hinder him from coming at all, and that the old man would die alone and unconfessed in his shieling. "Nobody is with him—poor old man!

—never, never may I see him alive again; but there is no need for me to wait here. I will run home—the waters cannot be much higher than when I came down the glen." Flora now wept in passion to return to the shieling—and tying up that long wet yellow hair, was ready to start out into the wild and raging weather.

It happened that the minister of the parish—young Mr Gordon—was in the house, and one of the shepherds went to call him out from the parlour, that he might persuade Flora to be contented where she was, as certain death would be in her attempt to go up Glen-Nevis. He did all he could to soothe her agitation, but in vain—and as the good priest, Mr Macdonald, did not appear, he began to think that old Lewis should not be left so long on his deathbed. He therefore addressed himself to two of the most active shepherds, and asked if they had any objections to take Flora to the shieling. They immediately rose up—on with their plaids—and took their staffs into their hands. Flora's face smiled faintly through its tears; and Mr Gordon mildly said, "What is easy to you, shepherds, cannot be difficult to me—I will go with you." The young minister was a Highlander born—had in his boyhood trod the mountains of Badenoch and Lochaber—and there was not a shepherd or huntsman, far or near, that could leave him behind either on level or height. So they all issued forth into the hurricane, and little Flora was as safe under their care as if she had been sitting in the kirk.

The party kept well up on the sides of the mountain; for the Nevis overflowed many parts of the glens, and the nameless torrents, that in dry weather exist not, were tumbling down in reddened foam from every scaur. The river was often like a lake; and cliffs, covered with tall birches, or a few native pines, stood islanded here and there, perhaps with a shrieking heron waiting on a high bough for the subsiding of the waters. Now a shepherd, and now the minister, took Flora in his arms, as they breasted together the rushing streams—and the child felt that, had she been allowed to go by herself, the Nevis would have soon swept her down into the salt Linnhe Loch. In an hour all the wild part of the journey was over;—their feet were on a vast heathery bosom of a hill, down which only small rills oozed out of gushing springs, and soon lost themselves again—and after a few minutes' easy walking, during which Flora led the way, she turned about to the minister, and, pointing with her little hand, cried, "Yonder's the shieling, sir—my grandfather, if alive, will bless your face at his bedside."

Mr Gordon knew all the country well, and he had often before been at the head of Glen-Nevis. But he had never beheld it, till now, in all its glory. He stood on a bend of the river, which was seen coming down from the cataract several miles distant, among its magnificent cliffs and dark pine forests. That long and final reach of the glen gleamed and thundered before him—a lurid light from the yet agitated heavens fell heavily on the discoloured flood—the mountains of heather that enclosed the glen were black as pitch in the gloom—but here and there a wet cliff shone forth to some pass-

ing gleam, as bright as a beacon. The mass of pines was ever and anon seen to stoop and heave below the storm, while the spray of that cataract went half-way up the wooded cliffs, and gave a slight tinge of beauty with its blue and purple mist, to the grim and howling solitude. High above all, and as if standing almost in another world, was seen now the very crest of Ben-Nevis—for although fast-rolling clouds, and mist, and steam, girdled his enormous sides, all vapours had left his summit, and it shot up proudly and calmly into its pure region of settled sky.

But Mr Gordon had not come here to admire the grandeur of nature—it had struck his soul as he looked and listened; but now he was standing at the door of the shieling. Rocks lay all around it—but it was on a small green plot of its own—and over the door, which could not be entered even by little Flora without stooping, was extended the immense antlers of an old deer, which Lewis had shot twenty years ago in the Forest of Lochiel, the largest ever seen before or since in all the Highlands. Flora came out, with eager eyes and a suppressed voice, "Come in, sir—come in, sir—my father is alive, and is quite, quite sensible."

The young minister entered the shieling—while the two shepherds lay down on their plaids below some overhanging rocks, where the ground was just as dry as the floor of a room. "Welcome—welcome, sir—you are not just the one I have been hoping for; but if he does not arrive till I am gone, I trust that, although we are of different creeds, God will receive my poor sinful soul out of your hands. You are a good pious minister of his word—Mr Gordon, I am a Catholic and you a Protestant—but through Him who died for us we surely may alike hope to be saved. That was a sore pang, sir—say a prayer—say a prayer."

The old man was stretched, in his Highland garb (he had never worn another), on a decent clean bed, that smelt sweet and fresh of the heather. His long silvery locks, of which it was thought he had for many years been not a little proud, and which had so often waved in the mountain winds, were now lying still—the fixed and sunken look of approaching death was on a face which, now that its animation was calmed, seemed old, old, indeed; but there was something majestic in his massy bulk, stretched out beneath an inexorable power in that shieling, little larger than a vaulted grave. He lay there like an old chieftain of the elder time—one of Ossian's heroes unfortunate in his later age—and dying ingloriously at last with a little weeping Malvina at his heather couch. The open chimney, if so it might be called, black with smoke, let in a glimmer of the sky—a small torch made of the pine-wood was burning close to the nearly extinguished peat embers, and its light had, no doubt, been useful when the shadow of the thunder-cloud darkened the little window, that consisted of a single pane. But through that single pane the eye could discern a sublime amphitheatre of woodland cliffs, and it almost seemed as if placed there to command a view of the great cataract.

Mr Gordon prayed—while little Flora sat down on the foot of the

bed, pale, but not weeping, for awe had hushed her soul. Not a word was in his prayer which might not have comforted any dying Christian, of any creed, in any part of the earth. God was taking back the life he had given, and an immortal soul was about to go to judgment. The old man had made small show of religion, but he had never violated its ordinances; and that he was a good Catholic was acknowledged, otherwise he would not have been so well-beloved and kindly treated by Mr Macdonald, a man of piety and virtue. Now and then a groan came from his ample chest, and a convulsion shook all his frame; for there was no general decay of nature—some mortal malady had attacked his heart. "Bless you—bless you—my dear young boy," said the ancient whitehaired image—"This is a hard struggle—a cannon-ball is more merciful." Then Flora wept, and went up to his head, and wiped the big drops from his brow, and kissed him. "This is my little Flora's kiss, I am sure; but my eyes are dim, and I see thee not. My bonny roe, thou must trot away down, when I am dead, to the low country—down to some of my friends about the Fort—this bit shieling will be a wild den soon—and the raven will sit upon the deer's horns when I am gone. My rifle keeps him on the cliff now; but, God forgive me!—what thoughts are these for a dying man—God forgive me!"

Old Lewis Cameron sat up on his heather bed; and looking about, said, "I cannot last long; but it comes in fits. Now I have no pain. Was it not kind in that fearless creature to run down the glen in that thunder-storm? I was scarcely sensible when I knew, by the silence of the shieling, that she was gone. In a little I sat up, as I am doing now, and I saw her, through that bit window, far down the glen. I knew God would keep down the waters for her sake—she was like a seamew in a storm!" Flora went out and brought in the shepherds. They were awe-struck on seeing the gigantic old man sitting up, with his long white hair and ghost-like face; but he stretched out his hand to them, and they received his blessing. "Flora, give the minister and the lads some refreshment—eat and drink at my death—eat and drink at my funeral. Ay, I am a pensioner of the King's—and I will leave enough to make auld Lewis Cameron's funeral as cheerful a ane as ever gathered together in a barn; and likewise leave Flora, there, enough to make life blythe when she is a woman." Flora brought out the goat-milk cheese, the barley-cakes, and the whisky-jar; and old Lewis himself having blessed the meal, Mr Gordon, the shepherds, and little Flora, too, sat down and ate.

Old Lewis looked at them with a smile. "My eyesight is come back to me, I see my Flora there as bonny as ever. Taste the whisky, Mr Gordon—it is sma'-still, and will do harm to no man. Mr Gordon, you may wonder, no, you will not wonder, to hear a dying man speaking thus. But God has given me meat and drink for a hundred years, and that is the last meal I shall ever bless. I look on you all as fellow Christians, now supported by the same God that fed me. Eat—drink—and be merry. This is the very day of the month on which General Wolfe was killed—a proper day for an old

soldier to die. I think I see the general lying on the ground, for I was near him as an orderly-sergeant. Several Indian warriors were by, with long black hair and outlandish dresses. I saw Wolfe die—and just before he died, our line gave a shout that brought the fire into his dim eyes, for the French were flying before our bayonets; and Montcalm himself, though our general did not know that, was killed, and Quebec, next day, was ours. I remember it all like yesterday." The old man's white face kindled, and he lifted up his long sinewy arm as he spoke, but it fell down upon the bed, for his strength was gone. But he had a long interval of ease between the paroxysms, and his soul, kindling over the recollections of his long life, was anxious to hold communion till the very last, with those whose fathers he had remembered children. His was a long look-back through the noise and the silence of several generations. "Great changes, they say, are going on all over the world now. I have seen some myself in my day. But oh! my heart is sad to think on the changes in the Highlands themselves. Glens, that could once have sent out a hundred bayonets, belonging entirely now to some fat Lowland grazier. Confound such policy, says auld Lewis Cameron!" With these words he fell back, and lay exhausted on his heather-bed.

"Hamish Fraser, take the pipes, and gang out on the green and play 'Lochiel's awa' to France." That tune made many a bluidy hand on that day—the Highlanders were broken—when Donald Fraser, your grandfather, blew up 'Lochiel's awa' to France.' He was sitting on the ground with a broken leg, and och, but the Camerons were red wud with shame and anger, and in a twinkling there was a cry that might have been heard frae them to the top of Ben-Nevis, and five hundred bayonets were brought down to the charge, till the Mounseers cried out for quarter. But we gied them nane—for our souls were up, and we were wet-shod in bluid. I was among the foremost wi' my broadsword, and cut them down on baith sides o' me like windle-straes. A broadsword was ance a deadly weapon in these hands, but they are stiff now, and lying by my side just like the stone image o' that man in Elgin churchyard, on a tomb-stane."

Hamish Fraser did as he was desired—and the wild sound of that martial instrument filled the great glen from stream to sky, and the echoes rolled round and round the mountain-tops, as if the bands of fifty regiments were playing a prelude to battle. "Weel blawn, and weel fingered baith," quoth old Lewis—"the chiel plays just like his grandfather."

The music ceased, and Hamish Fraser, on coming back into the shieling, said, "I see two men on horseback coming up the glen—one is on a white horse."

"Ay—blessed be God that is the good priest; now will I die in peace. My last earthly thoughts are gone by. He will show me the salvation of Christ—the road that leadeth to eternal life. My dear son—good Mr Gordon—I felt happy in your prayers and exhortations. But the minister of my own holy religion is at hand—and

it is pleasant to die in the faith of one's forefathers. When he comes, you will leave us by ourselves—even my little Flora will go with you into the air for a little. The rain—is it not over and gone? And I hear no wind—only the voice of streams."

The sound of horses' feet was now on the turf before the door of the shieling, and Mr Macdonald came in with a friend. The dying man looked towards his priest with a happy countenance, and he blessed him in the name of God—of Christ—and of his blessed Mother, the undefiled Virgin. He then uttered a few indistinct words addressed to the person who accompanied him; and their was silence in the shieling.

"I was from home when the messenger came to my house; but he found me at the house of Mr Christie, the clergyman of the English church at Fort-William, and he would not suffer me to come up the glen alone—so you now see him along with me, Lewis."

The dying man said, "This indeed is Christian charity. Here, in a lonely shieling, by the deathbed of a poor old man, are standing three ministers of God—each of a different persuasion—a Catholic—an Episcopal—and a Presbyter. All of you have been kind to me for several years—and now you are all anxious for the salvation of my soul. God has indeed been merciful to me, a sinner."

The Catholic priest was himself an old man, although thirty years younger than poor Lewis Cameron; and he was the faithful shepherd of a small flock. He was revered by all who knew him for the apostolical fervour of his faith, the simplicity of his manners, and the blamelessness of his life. A humble man among the humble, and poor in spirit in the huts of the poor. But he had one character in the Highland glens, where he was known only as the teacher and comforter of the souls of his little flock—and another in the wide world, where his name was not undistinguished among those of men gifted with talent and rich in erudition. He had passed his youth in foreign countries—but had returned to the neighbourhood of his birthplace as his life was drawing towards a close, and for several years had resided in that wild region, esteeming his lot, although humble, yet high, if through him a few sinners were made repentant, and resignation brought by his voice to the dying bed.

With this good man had come to the lonely shieling Mr Christie, the Episcopalian clergyman, who had received his education in an English university, and brought to the discharge of his duties in this wild region, a mind cultivated by classical learning, and rich in the literature and philosophy of Greece and Rome. Towards him, a very young person, the heart of the old priest had warmed on their very first meeting; and they really loved each other quite like father and son. The character of Mr Gordon, although unlike theirs in almost all respects, was yet not uncongenial. His strong native sense, his generous feeling, his ardent zeal, were all estimated by them as they deserved; and while he willingly bowed to their superior talents and acquirements, he maintained an equality with them both, in that devotion to his sacred duties, and Christian care of the souls of his flock, without which a minister can neither be respectable nor

happy. In knowledge of the character, customs, modes of thinking and feeling, and the manners of the people, he was greatly superior to both his friends; and his advice, although always given with diffidence, and never but when asked, was most useful to them in the spiritual guidance of their own flocks.

This friendly and truly Christian intercourse having subsisted for several years between these three ministers of religion, the blessed effects of it were visible, and were deeply and widely felt in the hearts of the inhabitants of this district. All causes of jealousy, dislike, and disunion, seemed to vanish into air, between people of these different persuasions, when they saw the true regard which they whom they most honoured and revered thus cherished for one another; and when the ordinary unthinking prejudices were laid aside, from which springs so much embitterment of the very blood, an appeal was then made, and seldom in vain, to deeper feelings in the heart, and nobler principles in the understanding, which otherwise would have remained inoperative. Thus the dwellers in the glens and on the mountains, without ceasing to love and delight in their own mode of worship, and without losing a single hallowed association that clung to the person of the minister of God, to the walls of the house in which He was worshipped, to the words in which the creature humbly addressed the Creator, or to the ground in which they were all finally to be laid at rest, yet all lived and died in mutual toleration and peace. Nor could there be a more affecting example of this than what was now seen even in the low and lonely shieling of poor old Lewis Cameron. His breath had but a few gasps more to make—but his shieling was blessed by the presence of those men whose religion, different as it was in many outward things, and often made to be so fatally different in essentials too, was now one and the same, as they stood beside that deathbed, with a thousand torrents sounding through the evening air, and overshadowed in their devotion by the gloom of that stupendous mountain.

All but the greyhaired priest now left the shieling, and sat down together in a beautiful circlet of green, enclosed with small rocks most richly ornamented by nature even in this stormy clime, with many a graceful plant and blooming flower, to which the art of old Lewis and his Flora had added blossoms from the calmer gardens at the Fort. These and the heather perfumed the air—for the rain, though dense and strong, had not shattered a single spray, and every leaf and every bloom lifted itself cheerfully up, begemmed with large quivering diamond drops. There sat the silent party—while death was dealing with old Lewis, and the man of God giving comfort to his penitent spirit. They were waiting the event in peace, and even little Flora, elevated by the presence of these holy men, whose office seemed now so especially sacred, and cheered by their fatherly kindness to herself, sat in the middle of the group, and scarcely shed a tear.

In a little while Mr Macdonald came out from the shieling, and beckoned on one of them to approach. They did so, one after the other,

and thus singly took their last farewell of the ancient man. His agonies and strong convulsions were all over—he was now blind—but he seemed to hear their voices still, and to be quite sensible. Little Flora was the last to go in, and she stayed the longest. She came out sobbing as if her heart would break, for she had kissed his cold lips, from which there was no breath, and his eyelids that fell not down over the dim orbs.

"He is dead—he is dead!" said the child; and she went and sat down with her face hidden by her hands, on a stone at some distance from the rest, a little birch-tree hanging its limber sprays over her head, and, as the breeze touched them, letting down its clear dew-drops, on her yellow hair. As she sat there, a few goats, for it was now the hour of evening when they came to be milked from the high cliffy pastures, gathered round her; and her pet-lamb, which had been frisking unheeded among the heather after the hush of the storm, went bleating up to the sobbing shepherdess, and laid its head on her knees.

The evening had sunk down upon the glen, but the tempest was over, and though the torrents had not yet begun to subside, there was now a strong party, and no danger in their all journeying homewards together. One large star arose in the heaven—and a wide white glimmer over a breaking mass of clouds told that the moon was struggling through, and in another hour, if the upper current of air flowed on, would be apparent. No persuasion could induce little Flora to leave the shieling, and Hamish Fraser was left to sit with her all night beside the dead. So the company departed—and as they descended into the great glen, they heard the wild wail of the pipe, mixing with the sound of the streams and the moaning of cliffs and caverns. It was Hamish Fraser pouring out a Lament on the green before the shieling—a mournful but martial tune which the old soldier had loved, and which, if there were any superstitious thoughts in the soul of him who was playing, might be supposed to soothe the spirit yet lingering in the dark hollow of his native mountains.

HELEN EYRE.

In a beautiful town in the south of Scotland, distinguished by the noble river that sweeps by its gardens, its majestic bridge, its old crumbling tower, and a grandee's princely domains that stretch with their single gigantic trees, and many spacious groves, all around the clustered habitations, resided, for one half-year, an English Officer of Cavalry and a young and lovely woman, who was—not his wife. He was the youngest son of a noble family, and, with some of the vices, possessed many of the virtues of his profession. That he was a man of weak principles, he showed by having attached

to him, by the tenderest ties, one who, till she had known him, had been innocent, happy, and respected; that he was not a man of bad principles, he showed by an attention to her as gentle, refined, and constant as ever husband paid to wife. He loved her truly and well. She was his mistress—degraded, despised, looked on with curious and scornful eyes—unspoken to but by his voice, solitary indeed when he was absent, and revived by his presence into a troubled and miserable delight, that even more than her lonely agonies told her that she was for ever and irretrievably lost. She was his mistress—that was known to the grave who condemned, to the gay who connived, and to the tender-hearted who pitied them both, her and her seducer; but though she knew that such was her odious name, yet, when no eyes were upon her but those of Marmaduke Stanley, she forgot or cared not for all that humiliation; and, conscious of her own affection, fidelity, and, but for him, innocence too, she sometimes even admitted into her heart a throb of joy and of pride in the endearments and attachment of him whom all admired and so many had loved. To be respectable again was impossible—but to be to true to the death unto her seducer, if not her duty, was now her despair; and while she prayed to God for forgiveness, she also prayed that, when she died, her head might be lying on his guilty but affectionate bosom. To fly from him, even if it were to become a beggar on the highway, or a gleaner in the field, often did her conscience tell her; but though conscience spoke so, how could it act, when enveloped and fettered in a thousand intertwisted folds of affections and passions, one and all of them as strong as the very spirit of life?

Helen Eyre prayed that she might die: and her prayer was granted. He who should have been her husband, had been ordered suddenly away to America—and Helen was left behind (not altogether friendless), as her health was delicate, and she was about to become a mother. They parted with many tears—as husband and wife would have parted; but, dearly as she loved her Marmaduke, she hoped that he might never see her more, and in a few years forget that such a creature had ever been. She blessed him before he went away even upon her knees, in a fit of love, grief, fear, remorse, and contrition; and as she beheld him wave his white plumes towards her from a distance, and then disappear among the trees, she said, "Now I am left alone for repentance, with my God!"

This unfortunate young creature gave birth to a child; and, after enjoying the deep delight of its murmuring lips for a few days, during which the desire of life revived within her, she expired with it asleep in her bosom. Small, indeed, was the funeral of the English officer's fair English mistress. But she was decently and quietly laid in her grave; for, despised as she had been when living, she was only pitied now, and no one chose to think but of her youth, her beauty, her pale and melancholy face, her humble mien, and acts of kindness and charity to the poor, whom she treated always as her superiors—for they, though in want, might be innocent, and she had gone far astray. Where too, thought many, who saw the funeral pass by—

where are her relations at this moment? No doubt, so pretty and elegant a being must have had many who once loved and were proud of her; but such thoughts passed by with the bier—she was buried, and a plain stone laid over her, according to her own desire: "HERE LIES HELEN EYRE, AN ORPHAN, AGED TWENTY-TWO YEARS."

There was one true Christian who had neither been afraid nor ashamed to visit Helen Eyre during the last few weeks of her life, when it seemed almost certain that life was near its close. This was Mrs Montgomery, the widow of a country gentleman of good family, who had for some years resided in the town. This excellent woman knew Marmaduke Stanley, and was not a stranger to the circumstances of this unfortunate and guilty connexion. On his departure she had promised to take care that Helen Eyre should be looked after in her illness—and, when the hand of death lay upon the poor friendless orphan, she was frequently with her at her bedside, administering comfort and consolation. Such kindness from such a person, at such a time, supported the soul of the dying mother when it was most disconsolate; it quieted all the natural fears of dissolution; and when she, whose own life had been a model of all that was good and beautiful and lofty in the female character, bent down over the penitent sinner and kissed her fair young brow, now cold and clammy in the death-throes, that Christian kiss seemed to assure her that she might be forgiven; and if God, as we believe, beholds the creatures He has made, it was registered in heaven.

Mrs Montgomery took the infant into her own house, and had written to inform its father of what had happened, when she read in a newspaper, that in a skirmish Major Marmaduke Stanley had been killed. She then opened a letter he had left with her on his departure—and found that he had bequeathed his small fortune of four thousand pounds to Mrs Montgomery, that she might settle it properly on the mother of his child if she survived—if not, upon the infant.

The infant orphan was christened Helen Eyre, after its mother, whom, frail as she had been, there was no need that her child, at least, should ever disown. No one wished to have the baby that now belonged to none. And this excellent lady, from no whim, no caprice, no enthusiasm, but touched at the heart with its utter and forlorn helplessness, by sorrow for its poor mother's transgression and early fate, and by something of a maternal affection for its dead father, resolved to adopt Helen Eyre as her own child, and to educate her in a woman's accomplishments, and a Christian's faith. Some smiled—some disdained—and a few even blamed—the kindness that could rescue an orphan from an orphan's fate. Many, too, wondered, they knew not why, when it was known that Major Stanley had left all his fortune to Mrs Montgomery for behoof of the child. But in a few months it was felt by every one, whatever they might choose to acknowledge, that the brave soldier had had a good heart, and that he had committed the interests of his orphan, even before she was born, to one whose character was summed up in that one word—a Christian.

It often seems as if those children who have fewest to love them in the world grow up the most worthy of love. Here was an Orphan born in sin, in shame, and in sorrow—and now left alone on the earth—who grew up beautiful to all eyes, and captivating to all hearts. Before five summers had shone upon her blue eyes, the child was noticeable among all other children. Her mother had been lovely; and there was a time, too, it was said, when her presence had been welcome in the halls even of the noble, who had visited her parents in their pleasant dwelling beside their own church. Her father, however deficient in more solid worth, had been the ornament of polished life; and it seemed as if nature preserved in this small, and beautiful, and graceful image, the united attractions of both the unfortunate dead. The very loneliness of the sweet child, without a natural home in the world, could not but interest every good heart; but her exceeding beauty made an impression almost like that of love even upon the heartless—and "English Helen."—so she was familiarly called to distinguish her from another child of the same Christian name at school—was a favourite with all. Besides, she was the adopted daughter of Mrs Montgomery, and that added a charm even to her beauty, her sweetness, and her innocence.

The heart of Helen Eyre expanded, month after month, in the joy of its innocence, and felt the holy voice of nature whispering to it new feelings of love and affection. The children with whom she played had fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and many other friends. She had none. She loved the lady who was so good to her, and by whose bed she slept at night on her own small couch. But she knew that it was not her mother with whom she lived. She had been told that both father and mother were dead; and sometimes the sweet child wept for those she had never seen, and of whom she knew nothing but that they had both been buried long ago. Something sad and melancholy, therefore, mixed itself with youth's native gladness, and a corresponding expression settled itself about her eyes, and often smoothed the dimples on her smiling cheeks. "English Helen's" own heart told her what she had often heard her childish companions say, that she was an orphan; but she knew that, though that was something mournful, it could not be wicked, and that, therefore, people would pity her more—not love her less—because her father had been killed in the wars, and her mother had died soon after she was born of a broken heart.

One day Helen Eyre had wandered with some of her companions into the churchyard, near the Old Tower, and, attracted by the murmuring blossoms of a shady horse-chestnut tree, that hung its branches over several tombs and grave-stones, in a corner near the river side, she tripped into the shade, and letting fall her eyes upon a grey slab, she read there her own name, the inscription on her mother's grave. She went home drowned in tears, and asked her guardian if that was not the stone under which her mother was buried. The good old lady went with her to the churchyard, and they sat down together upon that stone. Helen was now ten years

old; and perhaps had heard, although she scarcely knew that she had, some dim intimations in the language of her playfellows, which they themselves had not understood, that she was "a natural child." Mrs Montgomery spoke to her about her parents; and while the sweet child kept her weeping eyes fixed upon her face, as she spoke, in a bewildered and perplexing grief, she came to know, at last, that her mother had been guilty of a great sin, but had been forgiven by God, and had died happy. The child was told, too, although that she could scarcely believe, that some might love herself less for that reason; but that the truly good would love her the more, if she continued to be what she now was, innocent, sweet-tempered, and obedient to God's holy laws. "Your mother, Helen, was a kind, gentle, and religious being; and you must always think so, when you weep for her, here beside her grave, or elsewhere. When you are older, I will tell you more about her, and about your birth. But, my beloved, my good, and my beautiful child—for I do not fear to call thee so, even to thy sweet face—be not ashamed; hold up your head, Helen, among your companions, and my hands, as long as I live, will dress for thee that guileless bosom, and tend the flowing of that glossy hair. I am your mother now, Helen; are you not willing to be my child?" The Orphan could make no reply, for her little heart was full, almost to breaking—and she could only kiss the hand that took hers gently into it, and bathe it with happy and affectionate tears. They left the churchyard; and before they reached the sweet cottage on the river's side, Helen was gazing with delight on the queen butterflies, as they for a moment expanded their rich, brown, mottled, and scarlet wings on the yellow lustre of the laburnums, and then glanced, careering away over the fruit-trees into other gardens, or up into the sunshine of the open day.

In Scotland there prevails, it is believed, a strong feeling of an indefinite kind towards those whose birth has been such as that of poor Helen Eyre. This feeling is different in different minds; but, perhaps, in very few, such as seems reconcilable with a true Christian spirit. Scorn and aversion towards the innocent, however modified or restrained by better feelings, is not surely, in any circumstances, a temper of mind anywhere expressly recommended, or indirectly instilled by any passages in the New Testament; and, with reverence be it spoken, if we could imagine ourselves listening to the Living Christ, we should not expect to hear from his lips lessons of contumely or hardheartedness to poor, simple, innocent, orphan children. The morality of society is not to be protected by the encouragement of any feelings which Christianity condemns; and as such is the constitution of this world, that the innocent often suffer for the guilty, that is an awful consideration to deter from vice, but surely it is no reason for adding to the misfortunes of virtue. In coarse and vulgar minds this feeling towards illegitimate children is a loathing repugnance, and a bitter and angry scorn. And the name by which they call them is one that comes from their mouths steeped in inhuman pride, as if there were in it an

odious contamination. Alas! who are they that thus turn away with loathing from beings formed by God in his own image? Are they all pure—and innocent—and aloof from transgression? Or may not in such cases the scorn of the despicable, the mean, the cruel, the ignorant, and the licentious, fall upon the head of the generous, the just, the pure, the intelligent, the refined, and the pious? It is often so. Now, society has its own laws, and they are often stern enough; but let them never, with the good, prevail against the laws of nature; and let every mind that entertains the feeling now alluded to, be cautious, in justice to itself and to a fellow-creature, and in due reverence of a common Creator, to separate from it all undeserved virulence, all unchristian contumely —all unbrotherly or unsisterly hatred, and then they will know to how little it amounts, and how easily it must be forgotten in the contemplation of excellence;—and then, too, will they feel a far deeper compassion for them in whose minds that other rooted passion of contempt so rankly grows. There were many who wondered that Mrs Montgomery could have adopted such an Orphan. And with that coarse wonder they turned away from that noble, high-born, high-bred, and, what was far better, tender-hearted, compassionate, and pious lady, and from the beautiful creature at her side, rejoicing in protected innocence and awakened intelligence, beneath the light of her gracious affection.

As Helen Eyre grew out of her sweet girlhood into the ripening beauty of her virgin prime, this feeling regarding her became somewhat stronger. For now there was the jealousy—the envy—and the spite of little minds, painfully conscious of their inferiority, and impatient of total eclipse. They had the tone of the world's most worldly heart on their side; and it was easy, pleasant, safe, and satisfactory, to hang a cloud over her by one single word that could not be gainsaid, when it was felt that in itself the flower was fragrant and most beautiful. Campbell has, in the simple words of genius, spoken of the "magic of a name"—so likewise is there a blight in a name—a blight which may not fall on its object, but which can wither up the best feelings of our nature which the sight of that object was formed to cherish and expand. Helen by degrees instructed her heart in this knowledge, which from nature alone she never could have had—her guardian had told her the story of her birth — she read in books of persons situated as she was; and although sometimes her heart rebelled at what could not but appear to her most impious injustice, and although even sometimes she felt a sort of angry and obstinate pride which she knew was wrong—yet such was the felicity of her nature, that the knowledge wrought no disturbance in her character; and she was now in her undisputed beauty, her acknowledged accomplishments, and her conscious innocence, humble but happy, sedate but not depressed, not too ready either with her smiles or tears, but prodigal of both when nature knocked at her heart and asked admission there for grief or for joy.

Helen Eyre was no object of pity; for her bark had been drawn

up into a quiet haven, and moored to a green shore overspread with flowers. Yet still she was an orphan, and the world wore a different aspect to her eyes from that which it presented to other young persons, with troops of friends and relations, bound to them by hereditary connections, or by the ties of blood. They had daily presented to them food for all the affections of the heart: their feelings had not either to sleep or else to be self-stirred, for a thousand pleasant occurrences were constantly touching them with almost unconscious delight. Life to them offered a succession of pleasures ready made to their hands, and they had but to bring hearts capable of enjoyment. Little demand is made on such as those, so long as health continues, and their worldly affairs are prosperous, to look often, or deeply, or steadily into their own souls. But with this Orphan the case was very different. She was often left alone to commune with her own heart; and unless thoughts, and feelings, and fancies rose up there, she must have been desolate. Her friends were often not living beings of the same age, and with the same pursuits as herself—for of them she came at last to have but few; but they were still, calm, silent, pure, and holy thoughts that passed in trains before her, when the Orphan was sitting in her solitude, with no one near to cheer her, or to disturb. When she read in the history of real life, or in the fictions of poetry, of characters who acted their parts well, and walked in the light of nature beautiful and blest, or tried and triumphant in the fires of affliction, these she made the friends of her heart, and with these she would hold silent communion all the day long. No eyes seemed averted from her, no faces frowned, nor did any harsh voices rise among the dead. All the good over whom the grave had closed were felt to be her friends; into that purified world no unkind feelings could intrude; and the Orphan felt no bar to intervene between her beating heart, and those who were the objects of her profound and devout affection. From the slights, or the taunts, or the coldness of living acquaintances, Helen Eyre could always turn to these sacred intimacies and friendships, unbroken and unimpaired; she could bring a tender light from the world of memory to soften down the ruggedness or the asperities of present existence; and thus while she was in one sense an Orphan, almost alone in life, in another she was the child of a family, noble, rich, powerful, great, and good.

Of such a happy nature, and trained by the wisdom of her youthful innocence to such habits of emotion and thought, Helen Eyre felt—but not keenly—the gradual falling off and decay of almost all her school-friendships. Some of her companions left that part of the country altogether, and she heard of them no more—some went home in the neighbourhood, and in a short time recognised her when they chanced to meet by a civil smile, question, curtsy, or shake of the hand, and no more—some seemed to forget her altogether, or to be afraid to remember her—and some treated her with a condescending, and patronising, and ostentatious kindness, which she easily understood to be a mixture of fear, shame, and pride. Such things as these Helen generally felt to be trifles; nor did they

permanently affect her peace. But sometimes, when her heart, like that of others, desired a homely, a human, and a lowly happiness, and was willing to unite itself in that happiness with one and all of its youthful friends, whoever they might be, poor Helen could not but feel the cruelty and injustice of such alienation, and perhaps may have wept unseen, to think that she was not allowed to share the affection even of the vulgar, the ignorant, and the mean. Many who at school, before they had learned the lessons of the world, truly and conscientiously loved her, and were grateful to "English Helen" for the assistance she lent them in their various tasks, and for her sweet and obliging disposition in all things, began now to keep down their natural emotions towards her, and to give way to the common sentiment. Tawdry misses, destitute of all accomplishments, and ignorant of all knowledge needful or graceful to woman's soul, were ashamed to be thought friends of Helen Eyre, and thought it necessary to explain, that she was only an acquaintance when they were at the Olivers' boarding-school, adding, that she was to be pitied, for that although, like all persons in her situation, she was excessively proud, yet she was certainly very clever, and did not want heart.

No doubt, it would have been nothing very remarkable had Helen Eyre, under such circumstances, become what such excellent judges esteemed her to be, irritable, unamiable, and proud. This treatment might have soured her disposition, and armed her against an unjust and cruel world. Some struggles she may have had against such feelings, for she was not without her frailties and imperfections; her cheek may have flushed, and her heart beat with indignation when insulted by overweening civility or spiteful scorn. Though she felt pride to be a vice, so was meanness; and, orphan as she was, and illegitimate too, conscious innocence and virtue, good-will to her fellow-creatures, and piety to her Creator, gave her rights and privileges which were entitled to respect, and which, without blame, she might vindicate, when slighted, insulted, or abused. Therefore, though humble, she was not abased, and a mild pensive dignity overspread all her demeanour, which abashed the mean, and won the commendation of all whose souls possessed a single spark of native nobility. Indeed, in her presence it was no easy matter to maintain or put into practice those unchristian principles which, when she was absent, burst forth in all their abject and slavish violence.

Her guardian, protector, and mother, Mrs Montgomery, was a woman who did not pretend to be altogether free from those prejudices or feelings—which she knew were too often carried to a wicked and sinful degree. But having had Helen put into her arms when an infant, out of the yet warm bosom of her dead mother, she had then felt but as a human being and a Christian towards a helpless child. Affection kept pace with Helen's growth, beauty, virtues, and accomplishments; and not the lightest shade of this feeling now overcast her love. It had long been extinguished by the power of innocence and joy; and the knowledge of the strength of such prejudices in the minds of others, had now only the effect of increasing

her pride in her dear orphan, and of adding a holier tenderness to her protecting love. "Shall she be despised whom every morning and every night I see on her knees before her God—she whom that God has created so good and so beautiful, and who would die for the sake of my old grey hairs!" There was no occasion to conceal one thought from Helen Eyre—she knew her situation now perfectly and wisely—she acknowledged that her parents' sins were a misfortune to her—she was willing to bear the burden of their errors—to suffer what must be suffered—and to enjoy meekly, humbly, and gratefully, what might be enjoyed. Were all the world to despise her—such was her gratitude and affection to her mother, that in that alone she could be satisfied—to live for her—to tend her declining age—and, if surviving her, to dedicate the holiest thoughts of her retired life to her memory.

But there was one whom Helen Eyre could call her friend—one as young, as innocent, almost as beautiful as herself—and that was Constance Beaumont. Constance was the daughter of an old, indeed a noble family, and her mother, although justly proud of her rank in society, had not discountenanced her childish friendship with Helen, who lived under the roof of one of her own most respected friends. Still, this was a friendship which she had wished in her heart might insensibly fade away as her daughter advanced in life; for although her nature was above all miserable scorn towards a young creature so worthy of all love, yet she properly wished that the heart of her only daughter should be among her own kin, and that its deepest and tenderest sympathies should not be drawn away from the bosom of her own family. She had cheerfully allowed Constance to bring Helen to the Hirst during the vacations, and she could not but love the sweet orphan. She saw that her daughter could never learn anything bad, or mean, or vulgar, from such a companion; but, on the contrary, could not fail to have every virtue expanded, and every accomplishment heightened, by communication with one to whom nature had been so lavish in her endowments. Mrs Beaumont had too much good feeling, and too much good sense, to seek to break off such a friendship in their riper years; but it could scarcely be called blamable if she wished and hoped in her heart that its passionate warmth might be abated. She had another reason for desiring this, which she scarcely yet owned to her own heart—she had an only son, whose education in England was now completed, and who, she feared, might love Helen Eyre. The thought of such an alliance was unendurable—and Mrs Beaumont believed, that, dearly as she loved her son, she would rather see him in his grave than married to an illegitimate orphan.

That such was the state of this lady's mind, Helen Eyre had too true a sense of her own condition not to know. Of her thoughts respecting her son, indeed, she in her thoughtless innocence could suspect nothing, nor had she ever seen him but once when he was a schoolboy. But she knew that Mrs Beaumont was proud—though not offensively so—of her own ancestry and of her dead husband's; indeed, her stately manners were slightly tinged with pride—and

Helen had never left the spacious and rich rooms of the Hirst, and its gallery of old ancestral portraits, without a feeling, not of depression arising from her own insignificance, but of the wide distance at which she stood in rank from her best beloved friend and sister, the amiable and graceful Constance. Neither could she help feeling that Constance must feel this too; and every time she met or parted with her, there was now a faint sadness at her heart, and something that seemed to forebode separation.

But Constance Beaumont was too high-born to fear making a friend of one on whose birth there was a stain, even if she had not been too high-minded to suffer such a cause to interrupt their friendship. Strong and secure in her own high rank, and stronger and more secure still in her noble nature, no sooner did she discern the full extent of the general sentiment entertained towards Helen Eyre on the score of her birth, than every warm, pure, disinterested, and passionate emotion of her soul rose up yearning towards her; and she vowed, that as Helen had been the delight and blessing of her childhood and early youth, so should her heart be bound to her all life long, and own her at all times and in all places, with affection, gratitude, and pride. Accordingly, she never was in the town where Helen resided without visiting her—she kept up a constant and affectionate correspondence with her—she insisted on seeing her frequently at the Hirst; and often, often, with all the eager joyfulness of lovers, did these two beautiful and happy young creatures meet, almost by stealth, in the woods and groves, and among the gently sloping hills, to enjoy a solitary hour of impassioned friendship. Constance would not have disobeyed her mother in any positive injunction; of these sisterly assignations she was conscious that her mother would not have approved; but were the best and sweetest of all natural feelings to give way to a faint consideration of a doubtful duty? Could such disobedience be called wrong? And if it were so, might not the fault be repeated over and over again without remorse or self-upbraiding? So Constance felt and so she acted—nor in thus being a dutiful friend, is there any reason to believe that she was an undutiful daughter.

Thus was opening upon her the sweet and dewy prime of the Orphan's life, when an annual meeting took place of all the first families in the county, and indeed of people of all ranks and conditions, on a large meadow by the river side, near the town to witness the skill of the "Ancient Band of Border Bowmen." The sunny day flowed on in joyful and exhilarating pastimes, and in the evening there was a splendid Assembly. Mrs Montgomery was there, and Helen Eyre by her side. All the youth, beauty, and grace of the south of Scotland were present together; and although Helen Eyre was certainly one of the loveliest of the lovely, it could not be said that she attracted universal attention. There were many circles formed round many attractive centres—none shone exactly like the moon among the lesser stars; but of these stars themselves some were brighter than others, or diffused a mellower lustre. Helen Eyre knew her own situation—neither proud nor ashamed; her dress was

simpler than that of many others, but such as it became a lady to wear on such an occasion. A few pearls were round her soft auburn hair—and no eye looked upon her once, sitting half retired in her modest loveliness, without looking again and again—no heart, perhaps, but felt, after ranging over all the splendid galaxy, that there was one who had only to come forward and seek, in order to gain the prize of grace, elegance, and beauty. The music—the dancing—the stir—the waving of plumes—the sparkling of gems—smiling countenances, and happy voices—all touched the orphan to the very heart—that heart kindled with the joy of youth, and scarcely ever had Helen Eyre felt so happy and so imbued with the bliss of life. All thoughts were banished but those of exhilaration and gladness—she surrendered up her spirit to the gaiety, the mirth, and the glee that were sparkling, and whispering, and moving all around her—and she felt that a Ball was indeed one of the most delightful things in this world.

Mrs Montgomery had her pride, too, in her Orphan, as well as any mother in her child; and she took care that Helen Eyre should either have respectable friends—or none. This was the first public meeting at which Helen had been present; and when she saw every one dancing around her, her light heart longed to join the group. She looked with sparkling and delighted eyes on her sweet Constance, distinguished wherever she moved along; and at length that beautiful girl came up to her, and whispered in her ear that her brother, who had arrived from England too late for the archery, desired to be made acquainted with one of whom he had heard so much—Helen Eyre. Helen looked to Mrs Montgomery, and rising up, blushing, but unembarrassed, joined the dance with Henry Beaumont. As they took their place in the good old country-dance (not very far from the top), there was much tossing of heads—pursing of mouths—bridling up of elegant and inelegant figures—loud whispering—considerable tittering—and some little downright rudeness. But beauty will have its triumph; and Helen Eyre stood unruffled in that small storm. Henry Beaumont, too, was a young man of birth and great estates—by far the most elegant and accomplished person in the room, and an Officer in the Guards; and it was soon understood by the male part of the scorners, that it might not be quite prudent to express scorn or slight towards anybody who stood opposite to him in the dance. There was a haughtiness in his eye somewhat distressing to upstart people, and he carried himself in a way not very describable, but quite intelligible to the meanest and most vulgar capacity. He was likewise upwards of six feet high—and when it was his turn to lead off with Helen Eyre, there was a most polite attention shown to all their movements. It is no great merit, surely, to dance well; but now it seemed as it were—for every eye was turned upon that graceful pair, and even the most senselessly and basely proud felt that it was a pity Helen Eyre had been so born, for that she excelled in everything she tried, and was, indeed, most truly beautiful. Helen felt, and she enjoyed her triumph. To herself she attributed little of the politeness shown by young

Beaumont, but her heart overflowed with gratitude towards Constance; and when she again took her seat beside Mrs Montgomery, scarcely could she refrain from tears, so touched was she by the noble kindness of her friend. The evening passed away delightfully—Helen did not dance again—but she was frequently spoken to by young Beaumont; and whether her happiness gave a colour to everything around her, or it was really so, she thought that all her acquaintances looked less coldly and distantly upon her, and that little or no distinction seemed now to exist between herself and the other young and happy creatures laughing and talking on every side. She even dreamed of this meeting in her sleep; and in that dream it was not probable that she should see everybody except young Henry Beaumont.

Henry Beaumont never concealed his feelings; and next day he declared to his mother, that all Scotland did not hold such another delightful creature as Helen Eyre! The old lady heard these words with great gravity and solemnity, and said that she hoped her son would remember his birth, and not fall in love with such a person as poor Helen Eyre, however good and beautiful. "Fall in love, mother—who talks of falling in love? I have not fallen in love—not I; but this much is certain, that I must inquire of all my partners how they are this morning;"—and with that he flung out of the room, mounted his horse, and galloping across the country, as if at a steeple-chase, he soon found himself walking in a pretty little garden on Tweedside, with the good, worthy old Mrs Montgomery and her fair Helen. He called upon none of his other partners that day at least, and his subsequent asseverations that he had not fallen in love became less and less vehement. The truth is, that he had fallen in love—that he was desperately enamoured—and, being a young man of ardent feelings and headstrong will, he swore an oath within his soul, on parting from Helen that forenoon, that if he could gain her love, he would make her his wife!

Henry Beaumont was not without pride—indeed it was his besetting sin. But his heart was full of tenderness, and the situation of Helen Eyre was such as to bring all that tenderness up from its deepest spring. He was proud of his ancestry—perhaps of his own accomplishments—of his fine person—and of the power of his manners. He had been distinguished at a great public school, and afterwards at an English university, for the brilliancy of his talents. He no sooner joined the Guards, than he took his place, at once, among the most polished and elegant society in the world. He had met with universal admiration; and all these things together, although he well knew they possessed little intrinsic or permanent value, could not but influence his temper and disposition, before the gradually acquired wisdom of riper years had mellowed the impetuosity of youth, and extended its range of feeling and of thought. He was, therefore, considered by many a haughty and arrogant young man, and not altogether unjustly; but the native generosity of his heart was continually showing itself, and, although mere acquaintances or strangers might be repelled by his demeanour, no man could be

more esteemed or beloved by his friends. Now a new chord was touched in his heart. The sweet simplicity of Helen Eyre, combined, as it was, with perfect elegance and gracefulness, took his eye at the first glance ; and, although it could not be said to have gained, yet it certainly at once touched his affections. As the innocence of her heart and the intelligence of her mind indicated themselves unconsciously in every artless yet well-chosen word, love and admiration of a better kind stole into his breast ; and her exceeding loveliness and beauty gave the warmth of passion to an attachment which was of rapid growth, and, after a few interviews, was blended vitally with his very heart's blood. The tone of her voice now thrilled through every fibre of his frame—her image, during absence, haunted him, either sad or smiling, alike irresistible and subduing ; and, seeing no real obstacle in the way of his happiness, he thought, in his solitary rambles through the woods and over the hills (for now he, who had hitherto lived constantly in the stir of life, loved to be alone), that Providence had kindly sent this angelic being to bless him as long as he lived on earth. He thought of her—now in her virgin beauty—now as his bride—now as his wife—now as the mother of his children—and his heart was sick, his very soul was faint in the fever of tumultuous passion, till calmed again by solemn thoughts of eternal union between himself and Helen here and in heaven.

The love which Helen Eyre felt towards him was of a very different kind. It was utterly hopeless, and therefore it was utterly indulged. She knew that she never could be his wife—that he would never stoop to marry her—that Constance even would not like to see her brother forming a connection below his own rank—and that his mother would rather see her poisoned or drowned—at least, dead and buried—than the wife of her Henry. All these convictions gave her little or no distress, for they were not brought upon her unexpectedly, to damp a heart that had been warmed by other thoughts—they formed the habitual knowledge of that humble heart, and they and thoughts like them had been instilled into her bosom by her good and wise guardian, who knew that, to save her from melancholy, it was necessary to show her the truth of life, and to remove all delusions. Helen Eyre, therefore, allowed her soul to rejoice within her, in the agitation of a new and heavenly happiness, whenever Henry Beaumont appeared with his smiling countenance, that brightened up the room, or the field, or the garden, with an effulgence of bliss. She knew her own innocence—her own resignation—and she knew that if Mrs Montgomery, who was now very old, were to die, most solitary would be her own lot. Therefore she spoke, smiled, and walked with Henry Beaumont, as with the only being on earth whom, in the sacred silence of her soul, she would, till her dying hour, perfectly love. He could not penetrate into her thoughts—he could not look, with these bold bright beautiful eyes, into the covert of her inner spirit, where they all lay couched night and day for ever—he would place his love on some one of whom he had no cause to be ashamed, and who would be welcomed to the

hall of his fathers—he would then only bestow a passing smile, or word, upon the Orphan; but she, the Orphan herself, would cherish him in blameless and indulged passion in her bosom—and call down the blessing of God, morning and evening, and many a time besides, on the heads of himself, his wife, whoever she might be, and the children that might rise up, like flowers, around their feet. A love so hopeless—so pure—so unselfish—and so unknown, it surely could be no sin for her to cherish, who had no relations of her own, and few friends indeed—friends doomed, no doubt, to be fewer still, year after year, till at last she might have none to comfort her, but her sweet Constance, whom other affections might also keep too often away, and the image of that brother—an image which, engraven on her heart, could only cease to be, when that heart was broken, or had wasted and withered away into the dust.

Helen was walking one evening by the river-side, and had descended into a small green glade on a wooded bank, from which there was a cheerful and splendid prospect of the town and the rich country round, when Henry Beaumont was at her side, and taking her hand into his, pressed it to his heart, and then led her to a stone seat beside a little spring that bubbled up through the roots of the trees, and danced its short silvery course down into the Tweed. Poor Helen's breath came quickly when he pressed her to his bosom, and, with a few burning kisses and breathing words, declared his love and passion, and that she must become his wife. A pang of joy went through her heart, and she could just faintly utter, "Your wife!" "Yes—my wife—say that it will be so—and may God forget me if I am not kind to you—my best and most beautiful Helen—all the days of my life!" "Oh! sir—you could be unkind to no one—but think—oh think—who I am—unfit and unworthy to be the wife of Henry Beaumont!" He had an eloquent tongue—an eloquent eye—and there was eloquence in the throbbing and beating of the heart that swelled his manly breast. He held Helen in his arms, as if she had been a frightened and palpitating dove—and she wished not to be released from that dear embrace. She, the poor, despised, and slighted Orphan, heard herself blessed by him who was the pride and flower of Scotland's youth; his gentle, and tender, and respectful kisses, stirred up all the holy thoughts that she had hidden in her heart, that they might lie there unseen for ever—and in that trance of bliss they all overflowed, and a few words of confessed affection escaped her lips. "Yes—I love you beyond life and my own soul—but never, never, sir, may I be your wife. Think who you are—and then who am I—and a voice will tell you that we never can be united." With these words she broke from his arms and knelt down, nor was it in his power, so confounded was he for a few minutes, to lift her up. "But though I know you never can marry me, remember—oh! never, never cease to remember—that I fell down on my knees before you, and vowed before that God who has hitherto preserved me in innocence and peace, to devote my soul henceforth to your love. Enough will it be for me to cherish your image for ever in my heart—to weep with joy when I hear you are

happy—never to repine nor envy her happiness who may one day lie in your bosom ; but, since God sent me into the world an orphan unhappily born, let me strive to subdue my soul to an orphan's fate, and submit quietly and piously to the solitary years that may be awaiting me, when my mother's grey hairs are covered with darkness. Now, sir—now, my beloved Henry Beaumont, let us either part or walk away in silence, from this spot, which to me will be for ever a hallowed place ; for of love and marriage never more must our speech be—they are not for us."

Helen separated from her lover within a mile of her home—and had on her arrival there sufficiently recovered her self-command to be able to appear composed before Mrs Montgomery ; but she had never concealed from her dear mother any incident that affected her happiness, and she knew that it was now her duty to make a full disclosure of what had passed. She did so, and had the satisfaction to find that her conduct brought tears of joy into her mother's eyes. The good old lady assured her that God would reward her for the high-principled sacrifice she had made—and, on retiring to her bedroom at night, she blessed her Orphan with more than wonted fervour and solemnity.

No sleep was there this night for Helen Eyre. She had made a great sacrifice, and nature now rose up against it. Why should she not become the wife of Henry Beaumont, if he loved her, as he said, better than all the world ? Ought her birth to be a bar between her and a whole life of bliss ? Would she be violating any duty—doing injury or wrong to any living creature—by yielding herself up in wedlock to the man she so tenderly loved, and whom, she knew, she could make happy ? Were all the deepest, holiest, most awful affections of the soul to be denied to him and to her, merely because their union might offend a prejudice, or, at best, a feeling that surely never could be vital, nor set in just opposition to all that the human soul felt to be sanctified in its existence ? What if his mother were to be offended—might she not be soothed and reconciled by constant esteem and humble respect, and be brought at last to look without reproachful eyes on the Orphan who made her son happy ? But then, this prejudice against her she knew to be with many "a second nature ;" and that it could not be rooted out without shaking perhaps many, many other feelings, which, although not necessarily connected with it, had been so intertwined with it during the progress of life, that they too might suffer ; so that to overcome this sentiment against her, a radical change or revolution, never to be hoped for, must take place in the mind of Mrs Beaumont. She saw, too, that Mrs Montgomery felt as she felt—and had approved of her conduct, solely because she knew that Henry's high-born and haughty mother would never acknowledge her as his bride. So, Helen rose with the light—and, as the bright, cheerful, singing morn advanced, her heart was insensibly restored to its former serenity, and the Orphan was once more happy and contented with her lot.

Then, too, she thought what a heartless sin it would be, even if her marriage with Henry Beaumont could take place, to leave her

old mother, who was now so weak and frail. She had been taken, when a baby a few days old, under the protection of that saint—and would she fly off on the wings of a selfish and ungrateful love, and, forgetting these tottering steps and dim eyes, sink into the bosom of one whom she had known for a few weeks only, and to whom she owed nothing but a few impassioned words and vows? Such thoughts came across her heart. But she was no weak enthusiast even in virtue. And her own pure heart told her, that, though it would never have allowed her to leave her mother, who was much broken down, and too plainly sinking into the grave, yet that she might, without any violation or forgetfulness of her filial duties, have given Henry Beaumont a pledge to become his wife, when the event she feared, and shuddered indeed to name, but which every one knew was near, had taken place. All these were bewildering thoughts—and when poor Helen went into her mother's room, which she did every morning at a stated hour, her heart was labouring under a heavy load of emotion.

Helen drew the curtains, and was about to kneel down at the bedside, and bless her aged benefactress in prayer. But it seemed that she had not yet awoke; and stooping down, the Orphan affectionately whispered a few words into her ear, that she might gently dispel the slumber. But that was a sleep which neither low whisper nor loud thunder-crash might disturb. Helen knew that her mother was dead! And for the first time in her life, for her heart was the mistress and not the slave of its passions, she fainted at the side of the motionless body, with her arms laid softly over its breast.

Before the sun had reached its meridian, the death of Mrs Montgomery was known for many miles round the town where she had led more than twenty years of a benign and charitable life. The melancholy tidings soon reached the Hirst, and Constance Beaumont flew to comfort her dearest friend. Nor did her mother, who yet knew nothing of Henry's avowal of his love to Helen, think of preventing Constance from carrying comfort to the bereaved Orphan. Hers was a proud but a warm heart; and, having truly loved Mrs Montgomery, it was in tears that she saw Constance depart to cheer the poor creature who was now sitting by the corpse of her whom she had loved and respected from childhood, and whom she was, ere long, to follow to the grave. That thought of their ages being the same, was at once tender and solemn; and something of the sanctity of that pure unmingled affection with which she regarded the memory of Mrs Montgomery, could not but attach to Helen Eyre, who had so long tended her declining age, and repaid, by the most beautiful constancy of filial love, the cares which had been lavished in the warmth of nature, and the charity of Christian faith, upon her orphan head.

Helen knew that Constance would, immediately on hearing of Mrs Montgomery's death, write her a letter of tender condolence; but she was not prepared for such excessive kindness, when that most amiable girl opened her bedroom door with her own hand, and, with soft steps and streaming eyes, went up to her and kissed her cheek.

The Orphan felt, in that embrace, that she was not yet solitary in the world. There was nothing to break this friendship, although much to crush that other love, and she was glad, even in her sorrow, to know, that through all the changes and chances of this life, she would still hold a place in the heart of Constance Beaumont. The dead stillness of the house was supportable, now that the arm of her sister was round her neck—and they soon went hand-in-hand together, and gazed on the beautifully serene countenance of her whose spirit was in heaven. Of the two, Constance most loudly wept, for her tears fell more for the living than the dead. Who in all the world could be more solitary than the orphan, Helen Eyre? Yet her brow, eyes, cheeks, and lips were all calm; there was no agitation—nothing like despair in her quiet motions; and the light of God's mercy shone radiantly upon her as she knelt down to a prayer of thanksgiving in that desolate house. Never before had the full perfection of her character been made manifest. Now it was tried, and met the sudden and severe demand. Her voice faltered not, nor did her heart quake. She was alone on the earth, but God was in heaven—and with that sublime thought Helen Eyre was now stronger in her utter destitution, than if without it she had been intrenched in the midst of a host of mortal friends. The spirit of her piety kindled that, too, of her beloved Constance—and they sat together in the silent house, or in twilight walked out among the secret trees, perfectly composed and happy, till the day of the funeral.

That day was indeed one of sore trial, and Helen needed the support of her friend. Often, often—on every day since her death, had she stolen into the room where her mother lay, and sat by the bedside as motionless as the figure that lay there; but the hour was come when these visits were to end, and the phantom was to be borne off into the chambers of decay. In the silence of her darkened bedroom, with Constance sitting at her couch, the Orphan heard the frequent feet of the company assembling at the funeral. The friends were silent. At last the funeral was heard to be departing from the house. At that moment Helen rose, and, looking through an opening of the darkened window, she saw the bier in motion—slowly borne away up the avenue, below the shadow of the trees. A tall figure was at the right side of the coffin—one of the mourners. It was Henry Beaumont—his head was bowed down, and his face sedate in a manly sorrow. "See how my brother weeps!" said Constance—and Helen did not fear then to call down the blessing of God upon his head; and then turning to Constance, she said, "Happy, happy art thou to have such a brother!" And as they were kissing each other, the funeral disappeared.

Two days after the funeral Mrs Beaumont came for her daughter. She behaved with the greatest tenderness and sympathy to Helen Eyre, and had not sat long in company with the Orphan till her soul was even awed by the sanctity of her resignation. The flowers that the old lady had so carefully tended did not miss her hands; the room bore no marks of the distraction or forgetfulness of passionate

grief; Helen's dress was simple and graceful as ever; and except that her face was somewhat wan, and her voice occasionally tremulous, there were no other outward symptoms of sorrow. If the Orphan had thought of the future, it was plain that she felt that vista to terminate in the mystery of a darkness spread out in mercy from the hollow of God's awful hand, and that she was not about to terrify herself with phantoms of her own creation. If sorrow, sickness, or desertion by friends, was to be her lot, she would lay her hands upon the Bible, and endure the decree. But from the mildness of her expressive countenance, it seemed that her heart was confined chiefly to dreams of the happy past. She had no sins, and not many frailties with which to reproach herself; for these her contrition needed not to be bitter—no harsh or hasty words—no unamiable or unfilial looks had ever passed from her towards her benefactress; and as the humblest are permitted to enjoy the delight of conscious piety, and of a sincere wish to do well, so was Helen Eyre now happy in the remembrance of all her affection to her mother, and of every little daily and hourly act performed, not from duty, but in love.

Mrs Montgomery had bequeathed to the Orphan the pleasant dwelling in which she had passed all her days; and Helen desired no other place of retirement till she should be called to the last final and profound repose. The sacred influence of death had quite suppressed—not extinguished, her pure passion for Henry Beaumont; and, without agitation, she sat now in the presence of his stately mother, nor feared ever to deserve her frowns. She had seen Henry walking a weeping mourner by the side of that coffin—and the remembrance was now sad and delightful to her soul; nor, if he could be happy without her, did she wish ever to behold him more. A lonely life needed not to be a melancholy one;—she had stores for thought laid up in her heart, young as it was, and powers of thought too, confirmed by nature, and strengthened by contented innocence. And she feared not, when the years of her youth had glided away in the seclusion of those peaceful shades, that age would bring its own happiness and its own wisdom; nor was there any reason to fear even the coming on of feeble footsteps and of grey hairs. Henry Beaumont's impassioned vows never could be realised; but that place where she had heard them might be visited often and often—and hers, she knew, was not a weak and repining heart, that would die of hopeless and unfortunate love.

While they were sitting together calmly and kindly, and the time was just at hand when Constance was about to give her friend a farewell kiss, she saw her brother coming down the avenue, and could not but feel agitated at his approach. For, although Helen had said nothing to her of the avowal of his sentiments, he had himself told his sister of all that had happened, and sworn her for the present to secresy. He entered the room—not with the same fervent air and expression as when they last met, but with a tenderness that was far more irresistible to poor Helen's soul. A visit to an orphan who had just buried her best—not her only friend—was

not to be a visit of avowed love, but of sympathy and condolence; and Henry looked upon her with such profound pity, and such consoling gentleness of eye and voice, that his mother saw and felt that Helen Eyre was dearer to him than life. That sudden conviction gave her a pang, and her countenance fell and was darkened. It is a sore affliction to a mother's heart to have her fond, and proud, and aspiring hopes of an only son crushed—and nothing substituted in their stead but what she conceives dishonour and degradation. But she knew the depth of her son's affection for Helen Eyre from his anxiety to restrain and conceal it—and, being well aware of his determined character, she perceived that there was no chance of averting from her house the stain of such a marriage, except it were to be found in the quiet and humble soul of the Orphan, who might be dissuaded from entering into a family to which an alliance with her would be considered a disgrace. Mrs Beaumont's agitation at last became manifest—and as frequently feelings are brought to a crisis of a sudden, and by some unexpected movement or sally of temper, so was it now; for Henry discerned what was passing in his mother's mind, and, from an uncontrollable impulse, avowed his love for Helen Eyre, and his resolution to make her his wife. "She has confessed that she loves me—and no power on earth has a right to keep us asunder. Mother—I grieve to offend or distress you; but you must receive Helen Eyre as your daughter."

At any other time, this bold avowal would have sent as much anger as grief into the proud spirit of Mrs Beaumont. But she had loved her dead friend with exceeding affection—her voice seemed yet to whisper along the walls—they were all sitting together in deep mourning for her loss—and the meek face of the guileless Orphan was enough to quiet all angry emotion, and to inspire something of the same calm spirit with which it was so serenely suffused. Helen sat almost unmoved, nor did she utter a word. But Henry's mood soon changed, and he knelt down at his mother's feet, along with the affectionate Constance. Each took hold of one of her hands, kissed it, and bathed it in tears.

"Oh, mother! withhold not your blessing from sweet Helen Eyre," said Constance, with a dewy voice of supplication; "you know she will be the blessing of Henry's life here, and prepare his soul for heaven. You know that she will be as loving and dutiful a daughter even as myself. You know how her friend loved her, and blessed her name to you, and wept for the sake of all her goodness. Oh, mother! fear not that this marriage wants only your sanction to make it a happy marriage indeed!" The lady's heart was melted within her, and she said—"Helen Eyre, thou art an orphan no more; come and kneel down between my children." Helen did so with many sobs of overwhelming happiness, and bowed down her head almost to the floor. The mother of her lover laid her hand upon that head, and blessed her in God's holy name; and then all three rising from their knees, Henry Beaumont pressed Helen Eyre to his bosom, and kissed away her tears then and for ever.

TRIALS OF MARGARET LYNDSAY.

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OF

MARGARET LYNDSAY.

CHAPTER I.

THIRTY years ago there stood, under the shelter of the highest line of the Braid Hills, a cluster of cottages, remarkable for their romantic yet homely beauty. A few intermingled sycamore and horse-chestnut trees, rising in the midst of them, and seeming to belong to all alike, connected these lowly dwellings in one spirit of contentment and peace; so that they looked as if inhabited by a few families bound together by the ties of blood, and following the same quiet and retired occupation. Each had its own small garden in front, enclosed by its hawthorn and sweetbrier hedge, and humming cheerfully with its own hive of bees. Behind the hamlet was an old pasturage, not wholly cleared of furze, fern, and broom, and shaded by a wood on the hill-side, in whose thick covert the blackbirds and linnets built their nests, and where they were heard singing, from a great distance, in the calm of the morning or evening sunlight. The rich cultivation that belongs to the neighbourhood of a large city came close up to the pastoral bounds of this almost suburban village, and was stopped in its progress only by the nature of the ground, which, full of little dells or glens, guarded the green domain from alteration or decay.

Thus beautiful within itself, Brachead had also a command over a wide range of beauty. Between it and the city were many ancient and venerable groves, over which the Castle-rock lifted its battlements; while the long high pile of buildings terminated against the line of the rural Calton Hill and the magnificent ridge of the Salisbury Crags. In front, a thousand enclosures of variegated verdure stretched down to the dazzling Firth; and far off, to the west, were the great Highland mountains.

Little sensible, perhaps, were the simple dwellers in Brachead of the pleasures which such scenes inspire; for they were the children of labour and poverty; yet Nature wastes not her power in vain, and no doubt it mingles unconsciously with the happiness of every human heart. The rising and setting sun, as its light burnishes the cottage window, does more than merely awaken to toil, or give a welcome summons to rest; and in a country like Scotland, where thoughtful intelligence has long been the character of lowly life, it is not to be supposed that even the poorest and most ignorant are ever wholly indifferent to the wonderful works of God.

In this hamlet lived the family of Walter Lyndsay, the narrative of whose fortunes may perhaps not be unaffecting to those who feel a deep interest in every exhibition, however humble, of the joys and sorrows, the strength and the weakness, of the human heart.

Walter Lyndsay was the son of a man of education and talent, who had followed the hard and ill-requited profession of a surgeon in a small country parish, and had died of a rapid malady in the prime of life.—The boy had been apprenticed to a printer in Edinburgh, a friend of his father's; and, having excellent talents, he had been appointed foreman only a few weeks before the death of him whose last moments were made happy by thoughts of his only son's good conduct and prosperity. As his wife and that son were watching by the bedside the approach of the fatal hour, the dying man asked Walter to read to him the nineteenth chapter of St John. As the youth's faltering voice had finished the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh verses, his father asked him to repeat them—and it was done.

"When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

"Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."

At these words, his father folded his hands together across his breast, and that was the last perceptible motion. His wife saw she was a widow—and looked alternately towards the bed that now bore her husband's corpse, and her only son with the Bible yet unclosed upon his knees. There was no shriek in that silent room—only a few sobs and some natural tears. This widow did not belong to a faint-hearted and repining race. Her forefathers had been servants of God in tribulation and anguish; and she had swerved not from their pure and high faith in the midst of her own many afflictions. She went solemnly up to the clay, and kissed once and again the same dead smile—and from that hour thought of her husband's soul in heaven, not of the mortal weeds which it had dropped to decay.

Adam Lyndsay died poor; and, after his small debts and the expenses of his decent funeral had been paid, it appeared that nothing remained to his widow. They had brought up respectably several children, who had all died in the bloom of youth, except Walter, and their slender means had also been diminished by various unforeseen misfortunes. Walter's kind heart was glad within him, when he

saw his mother perfectly resigned in her utter destitution; and so did the widow's heart sing for joy, when her son told her, that during his lifetime she should never want, but must come and sit at her wheel, peacefully and cheerfully, by his own fireside. She felt it was a pure and deep happiness prepared for her by Nature, to be supported, in her old age, by the son whom alone God had spared out of all her fair flock; and when, on that night of her widowhood, she knelt down in solitary prayer, she blessed God for that holy dependence, in which she was thenceforth to rely on her first-born.

A few days after the funeral, Walter Lyndsay went to inquire for the health of Gilbert Craig, one of his father's best friends, who had been taken ill in the churchyard during the funeral, and led away before the sods had been smoothed down over the grave. Walter met the daughter of the old man at the door, and there was no need of words to tell him that she was an orphan. Alice Craig had from childhood been so intimate with the family of the Lyndsays, that she considered Walter quite in the light of a brother. She now wept piteously, and would not be comforted. After an hour passed in the desolate house, poor Alice said to him—"Oh! Walter, I know not what is to become of me; I have no relations but my uncle, and he, you know, does not like us. Will you speak to your mother before you go back to Edinburgh, and prevail on her to let me lodge with her as a servant? I will be careful of her and hers; and will work late and early for my bread. My father wept;—yes, forgetful of himself, he wept, a little before he died, for my sake. He prayed that your mother would be kind to me—and made me promise that I would live with her, if she would take me, as a servant."

Walter looked at Alice as she uttered these humble words with a pale face and anxious eyes, and he thought on the strict friendship there had so long been between their dead fathers. He remembered seeing Gilbert's careworn countenance at the funeral, overshadowed with sorrow, and touched, although he then knew it not, with the first symptoms of a mortal sickness. "Your father, Alice, got his death at my father's funeral." Her sobs were not yet suppressed—and her sweet face was drenched in tears. Walter, after a deep pause, went up to her, and gently kissing her cheek, said—"Yes, Alice, you shall live with my mother; but not as a servant. God bless you—I will go to my mother, and send her to you. The widow will bring comfort to the orphan."

It was at that hour Walter Lyndsay resolved to make Alice Craig his wife. She, in her simplicity, loved no one else, and did not think she had so loved even him; so after a few months they were married—and Walter took his wife and mother with him to Edinburgh. They had all been born in the country, and its images were gathered round their hearts, not to be dissevered without a painful regret. Walter's business kept him all day in the city—but his humble dwelling was now as much in the country as his father's house at Brierybank—and, under the united care of his wife and mother, it soon became by far the prettiest of all the pretty cottages of Braehead.

Walter was but a poor man, but he was able to support his wife

and mother comfortably and creditably—and in that he was rich to his heart's desire. They could sit at a frugal board—they could attend Divine service decently clad—they had even wherewithal sometimes to relieve the wants of others—poor neighbours fallen into decay, or the passing beggar, wayworn, famished, and houseless, and perhaps not less an object of human charity, because brought thus miserably low by his own follies, vices, or crimes.

CHAPTER II.

In this same cottage they had now lived nearly sixteen years, with various fluctuations of fortune in their humble existence, but always rather above than below the world. They had married very young—and were both yet in the prime of life, now that their four children were fast growing up by their side. Margaret, the eldest, had seen her fifteenth birthday, Laurence was a year younger, Esther eleven, and Marion ten years old.

Laurence, who had worked with his father, was a fine lively bold lad, full of fun and frolic, and liable to be carried away into idle and dangerons adventures by very slight temptations. Yet he was a kind brother, and wished always to be a dutiful son; so that, notwithstanding his frequent failings, he had been the life and soul of the house, which never looked like itself when he chanced to be absent. But his heart lay towards a sea life; so he allowed himself to fall into the way of the pressgang, and sailed in a frigate to the West Indies.

Esther was blind, having lost her eyes in the smallpox. That disease had sadly marred her beauty, and all the neighbours seemed at first to grieve for its loss, almost as much as that of the child's sight, for she had been singularly fair, and they all said that "there never had been such bonny blue een as those that were now white in their sockets." But although her beauty was gone, something even more sweet and endearing had taken its place upon her countenance. An expression of constant contentment—a faint smile, rarely overclouded, was on her cheeks and about her lips; and her voice was the sweetest ever heard. She never listened to any tune but she remembered it; and, before she was nine years old, she could sing all the old Scottish airs, many of them in a way of her own, than which nothing could be more pathetic. She was skilful even in needlework—and in a few lessons from an ingenious blind man, acquired the art of delicately plaiting almost every ornamental article that could be framed of straw. And thus did the blind child contribute her mite to the support of her parents' house.

Marion had suffered a still severer affliction. From a fever, in which she had struggled between life and death, she had recovered with a stricken mind. Something had touched her brain in the mys-

tery of that dreaming disease, and it was plain to all that she never, in this world, would be the same child as before. But there was nothing painful or repulsive about the altered creature; on the contrary, to a stranger she seemed more than commonly pretty and engaging, and it was not till she spoke that her condition appeared. She had been a gay and intelligent girl before the fever; her forehead was open and smooth, as if full of sense and feeling; and her features, unchanged, were still fine beneath the vacant and bewildered expression that so mournfully passed along their beauty. Her parents never permitted her to stray many steps out of their sight; but she seemed generally to be happy, out or in doors. Her silence often had with it a melancholy look, but it might be the appearance and not the reality of grief; for, immediately on being spoken to, she came out of those dim moods with a careless smile, and was made happy in a moment with any trifle—a flower, or an insect, or any creature that moved before her in life. Well, indeed, might she be called by a word, tenderly and pitifully applied to those so afflicted, an "Innocent;" yet now and then she made use of words, especially in her prayers, that seemed, in the darkness and confusion of her few erring thoughts, to give intimations of something not to be explained—something beyond the reach of her weak and bewildered reason. A clear light at times broke in transitory streaks over the twilight of her spirit—so that, in the profound meaning of that Scriptural expression, her parents felt that "her life was hidden with God."

In such a family, along with much joy, there must often have been much sorrow—when little Esther lost her eyes—and when poor Marion came out of the fever with an altered mind—and on many, many other occasions besides of unavoidable trial. But, although disease had often entered the house, death had passed by, as if relenting or aweed by the power of their prayers; and the blind white eyes of Esther, and the wandering words of Marion, made these children objects of deeper and tenderer love, and perhaps even of a more soul-searching happiness.

But even although far greater afflictions had befallen this family, they might have been patiently and unrepiningly borne by the parents, for the sake of one blessing alone, bestowed upon them in the eldest daughter, Margaret. Even her own mother, although to a deeply religious heart like hers, and one also filled with all maternal solicitude, beauty seemed in a child a possession rather fitted to awaken fear than pride, sorrow than joy—even she could not look upon Margaret Lyndsay without blessing her fair face and her pleasant form. And her blind sister used to say, "Margaret, I am sure, is the bonniest lassie in a' the town, for her voice is the saftest amang them a'; and, when I am falling asleep in her arms at night, her breath is as sweet as that o' the violets that the gardener frae the Castle brings, when he comes for my baskets." She was good, beautiful, and happy—now that youth was dawning upon her; and after all the trials she afterwards went through, the same thing might have been said of her with equal truth: for that union was not then impaired, when the silver had mixed with the bright auburn of her hair, and when

the joyful lustre of her hazel eyes had been dimmed by perpetual weeping of solitary and hopeless tears.

Walter's mother was still alive—now an old infirm woman, upwards of threescore and ten. She was as acute in her mind as ever, and as warm in her heart; but a palsy had stricken her some years before, and she had ever since been unable to walk. Dressed in a manner rather above, but yet most becoming her present very humble lot, she sat in her arm-chair by the fireside, and, with her trembling withered hands, and head that was slightly shaken by the effects of the malady, employed herself in knitting, or in reading her Bible, or the various histories of Scotland's Religious Martyrs. The native ease and even dignity of her manner, accompanied by the power of a strong understanding, not uncultivated, and the impressive sanctity of old age, would have been seen to advantage in a much higher rank of life. Her furrowed face, her tremulous hand, and her grey-haired head, moving in somewhat melancholy guise, wholly obscured any symptoms of lowly birth or demeanour, and rendered her such a ladylike matron as one might have expected to see in the hereditary house of some ancient family. She belonged to a race that had sworn and died for the Covenant; and with her religion was a strong and steady light, in which all her thoughts lay like outward objects distinctly defined below the sunshine. She was not religious only at the hour of morning and evening prayer, and in the house of God, when she had strength to go there; but at all times God was present with her, and her life was happy in the solemn expectation of death. Her grandchildren often stood round her knees with mingled affection, wonder, and awe, when she was relating to them true tales of the martyrs—here, Margaret, with her head glittering like a star before the old woman's faded eyesight—there, the blind Esther, sitting with her face fixed on the speaker, as if every feature gazed—and there too, perhaps, that other harmless thing, at times shedding tears, it knew not why, that were suddenly dried up again in smiles whose causeless and unintelligible lustre was even still more affecting.

Such was the Family of the Lyndsays at Brachead, where they had lived nearly sixteen years, but which they were destined soon to leave in sorrow—and for ever.

CHAPTER III.

There had been for several years a deeper cause of heartfelt misery in this family than the ordinary course of Nature bringing inevitable distresses; and the time was at hand when the cup of their griefs was to be filled to the overflowing brim. Walter Lyndsay had truly loved Alice Craig when he married her; and, however much his conduct now belied him, he loved her still with a tender and troubled affection. But he was not a man of firm and fixed principles, and espe-

cially he had been long wavering in his religious belief. He had met with many clever men in his own trade who were Free-Thinkers, and he had gradually suffered deistical opinions to enter his mind, till they had destroyed his very capacity of faith, and left him an Unbeliever, very ignorant, and even aware of his ignorance, yet unwilling and unable to return to the Christian creed.

After this change had taken place in the character of his mind, his feelings towards his old pious mother, which had formerly been those almost of reverence, underwent a painful reversal, and he now regarded her as under the power of a delusive and savage bigotry. A sort of angry and scornful pity towards her sometimes forced its way into his heart, especially when, with that maternal authority which he once had cheerfully obeyed without an effort, she rebuked him for any slight symptom of indifference or derision. In her presence he felt, for the most part, the indestructible power of her original and lofty character; but, when relieved from that habitual bondage, his mind was free to wander through the dim mazes of scepticism; and then the remembrance of her most peculiar tenets and doctrines, and of her stern approbation of many terrible and questionable deeds, strengthened his doubts of the truth of the Christian system itself, with which in her soul these were all identified. The austerity of his mother's religious faith seemed to him to increase, as merely human feelings fell away from her aged spirit; and, in that uncertain and unhappy temper, he received with sourness and dissatisfaction her most earnest and solemn warnings, and beseechings, and advices—all of which, in another frame of mind, would have seemed to him what they were, most truly touching, and even sublime, in a mother within the shadow of death passionately eager of her son's salvation.

His feelings towards his wife were altogether different. She was a meek, mild, quiet, still-hearted woman, free from all selfishness, and from the sudden power of any strong passion. She had seen, long before his mother, her husband's changing heart, and had striven to win it back by unupbraiding tenderness and by unobtrusive tears. She did not represent her own griefs—not even the situation of their family, in some respects so melancholy and helpless—as reasons to induce her husband not to question the faith in which he had been born, and had so long lived in happiness. But she spoke of the New Testament itself, and of the character of our Saviour. On such a subject, innocence, purity, and submissive serenity of soul, were eloquent indeed; and sometimes, even at midnight, when his disconsolate wife beseeched him to think on all these holy things in the same spirit he had once done, he took her kindly to his bosom, and bade God bless her—but, although with an affectionate, not with a religious heart. Her own calm and gentle faith in Divine revelation was as indestructible as that of that animated, eager, and impassioned old Saint, kindling over the persecutions of her ancestors, who had feared not to bathe their hands in blood, and to repel with avenging steel the murderer and oppressor. But when she saw, day after day, that her husband's heart was alike proof against his mother's denunciations

and her own meek entreaties, she sank into a deep and settled melancholy, and had all the appearance of a person fast fading away in a consumption.

There was no diminution of a wife's perfect love in this almost broken-hearted creature; nay, a sense of her husband's miserable state of soul made him far, far dearer than ever; for a sacred terror, at times almost reaching distraction, was now rarely absent from her mind, and all the passages in Scripture foreboding evil to such as shut their eyes upon the light, crowded upon her memory, and engraved themselves there in spite of her will. When the heart is miserable on account of a dearly beloved object, the face often seems as if revolted affection were the cause of its gloom. Walter began silently to himself to accuse his wife of unkindness, and when at last he so reproached her, the agony of her soul was such that she uttered not a single word, but sought to hide her unhappy face for a while from his angry eyes. Day by day, a change, slight and imperceptible, was taking place in an intercourse that, for so many years, had been one of uninterrupted cordiality, tenderness, and trust; and Alice felt at last, that along with his religion had gone much of his love, and that she, the bride of his youth, and the mother of his children, did not, as before, wholly and happily possess his heart.

She had but too good reason so to think; yet Walter had hitherto seldom been absolutely unkind—never brutal; and he often threw so much gentleness into his demeanour towards her, as if repenting of his alienation, that poor Alice, at such moments, felt her heart sicken with the very joy of hope. But those bursts of tenderness came from one whose feelings were changed, although his conscience, as it severely knew, still remained the same. Their prayers were not now said together on bended knees—or seldom so; the Sabbath-day came not now with healing under its wings, to lead them arm in hand with their children to the House of God. Whatever their thoughts were, never were their words of a future life; for Alice feared to speak now to her husband of that which had formerly stolen upon their hearts in hours both of joy and affliction. There was no communion of their souls now,—for his was shut up in the consciousness of change, and hers in that of love unchangeable—but, alas! now nearly hopeless of him for whose sake would she gladly have walked straight forward unto the death.

Perhaps there is a diseased pleasure in the troubled emotion of guilt that keeps the falling spirit so closely attached to it that it loses the power of a pure and reasonable happiness, and then adheres sullenly or fiercely to the error of its ways, although it knows they lead to infamy and death. It may have been so with this infatuated man. He loved his wife and his children, if not as he once loved them, yet better than all other objects on this earth. He could not lose the memory of so many smiles, tears, joys, griefs, tender words, and warm sighs of blameless delight, for so many long years. He remembered them all too, too well, when foolishly and wickedly absenting himself from Brachead. Yet still their power to recall him from destruction was dead and gone. It was gone

never to return, till at the approach of that awful hour, when all the old sacred emotions of the soul, which guilt may have driven away from her sanctuary, will once more, and for the last time, appear, either to confound or to console, and when all low, foul, and earthly thoughts will moulder away into the damp and darkness of the grave.

Walter Lyndsay was not only a reformer in religion, but also in politics, and he had for some time been one of the Friends of the People. It was now a dark day over all Europe. Anarchy had taken the place of despotism, and Atheism trampled down superstition. The same thick and sullen atmosphere which preceded that dire earthquake in France, was spreading over this country. The poor caught the moral contagion; and there were thousands and tens of thousands that, in the sudden blindness of that frenzy, began to mock at Christianity and its blessed symbol—the Cross. Paine, a name doomed to everlasting infamy, undertook to extinguish religion in the hearts and on the hearths of the poor; and the writings of the ignorant blasphemer were now read at Scottish ingles instead of the "Big ha' Bible, ance their father's pride." Walter Lyndsay brought to Braehead a copy of the *Age of Reason.*

For some months the health of the grandmother had rapidly declined, and she had requested to be allowed to remain always in her small bedroom. So the old arm-chair, in which the famous Mr Renwick had once sat in her grandfather's house, was removed from the place it had occupied for so many happy years, and the dying woman wished to be left much alone. Her eyes were now almost dark, but her hearing was little impaired, and duly, morning and evening, Margaret Lyndsay sat by the bedside, and read to her some chapters of the Bible. Bedridden and blind, she knew not that her son had concealed below his roof a book that derided the sufferings of our Saviour on the Cross. She was spared that pang, although another more deadly, but less hideous, was in preparation for her. The reckless Unbeliever yet so far respected his mother's grey hairs, that he left her on her deathbed to her Bible read by Margaret's sweet voice, which, however, he durst not more than once trust himself to hear. That, too, was accidentally; and the divine words, repeated by such a voice, and with such a face, in the ear of a dying Christian—(his own mother and his own daughter,)—so penetrated and stabbed his soul, that, in the bitter agony of the moment, he wished that he were dead, or never had been born.

As for his wife, she felt too surely that her power over his mind was now gone. She had been told, either in malice or pity, by an anonymous friend, that her husband's affection had, for some time, been bestowed on a worthless and guilty object; and there was often so wild and angry a trouble in his heart, that she believed that such indeed was his guilt. One night, in a miserable and convulsive dream, he moaned out a woman's name which she had never heard before; and there seemed to be affection in the unhappy voice of his dream. She removed not her arm from around his neck; but she knew, in her cold and heavy heart, that other arms than hers were now dearer

there, and from that hour she felt her wretchedness hopeless and complete. She strove to banish the belief, but it returned with the same sickening certainty; and Alice half upbraided herself with the selfishness of that virtuous love, that made her weep more rueful tears over her husband's infidelity to herself, than even over his disbelief in Him who died to save sinners.

It was not now the same house. Blind Esther sat at her work as usual, but her singing voice was now mute. All those beautiful hymns and anthems, and all the old Scottish airs, in which love and religion seem to blend together, and the grateful heart worships God in the same strains by which it expresses the constancy and the truth of its human affections—all now were silent. Even poor Marion sat still in a corner, and without her smiles, as if dim fears had found out some latent feeling in her heart, and struck her few words dumb. Yet it was not always thus. Walter Lyndsay sometimes yet passed whole evenings at home, which, but for the remembrance of the past, might have been almost thought happy. Then with a heart true in some of its strings to the sweet sounds of other days, he would sometimes lay his hand on Esther's head, and ask her for "an auld sang," which she, too too happy to hear again the kind request, would warble forth in a voice quivering with delighted filial affection.

But what would have become of the whole family, if it had not been for Margaret Lyndsay? A few months ago, and she was a gay joyous creature, borne about like a butterfly by every breeze, as if happiness were her employment, and all life one long summer. But on a sudden, and without regret or sorrow, or one repining thought, she saw into the nature of her own condition, and also in some degree into her mother's melancholy; and then her former thoughtless joy seemed to be wickedness and cruelty towards her dear mother, while her whole bliss lay in all the tender and most incessant offices of filial love. To see her mother recover her health and happiness, and her father in all respects the same as before, was now the sole single passion of her heart, by day and by night. In the enthusiasm of her young and innocent heart, that as yet knew not the power either of guilt or of misery, she feared not that in a little time her parents would be as well as ever; and often, in the strong delusion of her yearning love, she smiled, and danced, and sang for a few moments, as if there had already been a perfect reconcilement of all jarring and unhappy things. In one of those moments she flew to a shelf where Paine's book was lying, into which she had once looked with disgust and terror, and ever afterwards thought of it as a loathsome toad or stinging serpent that had crawled into the house—and, pressing it down into the red embers, left it to be consumed to ashes. She soon recovered to a fear of her father's anger; but she felt that she had utterly destroyed out of existence something hideous and hateful, and that fear was of short duration. On her father's return home that evening, she told him gently what she had done; and although he frowned fiercely, yet in a few minutes he called her to him on some slight excuse, and kissed her brow. For Margaret was not yet

sixteen years of age, and beautiful as an angel; and, lost man as he was, he rejoiced that his beloved daughter shuddered at the wretch who denied his Saviour and his God.

CHAPTER IV.

The family of Walter Lyndsay had never been rich, and hitherto, at the end of a year, all had been blithe and happy, if not one single small debt remained unpaid. Health and industry were their whole stock, and hitherto it had always yielded competence and comfort. The children had been taught to read by their grandmother, and Walter himself had in the evenings instructed those who could be so instructed in writing and accounts. That was their simple cheap education. Margaret and Esther had, for several years, bought and made their own plain garments, and there never had been anything but decent and thoughtful thrift in that calm household. But for some months past there had been a diminution, not only in those little comforts which cheer the life of poverty, but even in the necessaries of life. Walter had at last irreconcilably quarrelled with his employer, his father's friend; and his earnings were now scanty and irregular. No one in the house complained, nor with young or old was there a single dissatisfied or sullen look. The oatmeal chest had never yet been quite empty, and they could still pay for their weekly allowance of milk. With that they were satisfied, and thus were able to preserve to the old woman in her last days those comforts which old age requires; but which, had she suspected the worst, that high-souled matron would have put away from her in disdain, and not even have allowed a fire to be lighted to warm her palsied limbs.

Alice was not without a becoming pride; and, miserably poor and poorer as they now were each succeeding day, none of the neighbours had any reason to think, from what they saw, that the family was in want. Some few articles of apparel, that she had worn in better days, were sold to buy bread; but the white gown in which she was married she laid carefully aside, and everything she had worn on that too happy day. Whatever Walter had given her, when their hearts were undissevered, seemed now sacred to her soul in its deep distress; and she would almost have thought it her duty to keep all such things, even if she and her children had been dying of hunger. It was not much that they could do for themselves. Margaret had the constant tendance of her grandmother, who might die alone, if left for an hour. Esther, although always busy, could not always dispose of her work; and the mother, broken-hearted and feeble, did what she could with her needle, but often earned only a few pence in a whole day. Yet not the less gratefully did they say grace before and after meals; and when the Lord's Prayer was repeated, they felt the force of that request, and most humbly did they breathe it, "Give us this day our daily bread!"

In this state of things, one day Alice received a letter from her husband, which she read, and then sat down in a stupor like a swoon. In it he informed her, "that he had been imprisoned on a charge of High Treason by a timid and tyrannical Government, but that, if executed, he should lose his head in a just cause." Each word which he had chosen contained to his wife's ear the most horrid meanings; and in the swift thoughts of fear, she already saw a scaffold red with his life-blood. The tugging palpitation of her heart soon ceased in an icy coldness, and Margaret supported her to her bed. The terrified girl opened the little window, and the rich odours of the honeysuckle and moss-roses in a moment filled the room. Her mother soon revived, but for several days was unable to rise, so utterly had the sudden shock dashed her little remaining strength. She informed Margaret, and Esther too, of their father's situation; but it was to be concealed from his mother, as they all knew it would kill her at once.

Margaret Lyndsay went of her own accord, and knocked at the prison-door. The jailer at first looked at her with callous indifference; but when she told her name, and that she had come to see her father, he took her in without speaking, and shut the heavy gate. Margaret heard neither the hinge nor the bolt; she beheld nothing distinctly—only steep stairs, mouldy walls, and small grated windows, as if she saw them not—till the jailer, whom she closely followed, stopped short at a cell, and in a moment she was on her father's breast.

Walter Lyndsay was not prepared for this; and his soul, which a few minutes before had been sullen, and irritated, and inflamed, suddenly misgave him, and he clasped his Margaret to his bosom, and kissed, not without tears, her white open forehead, and the softness of her neck. "Oh! father—that dreadful letter—but it is not, cannot be true—you never were guilty, I am sure, of any crime that deserved death,—and you will soon be let out of prison—and then—O father, father!—surely you will come back to Brachead every evening, and never leave us any more."

In a few minutes, Walter Lyndsay, half-ashamed of his emotions, relieved himself from his daughter, and beckoned her to sit down on the edge of his iron bedstead, which she did in silence; for she now saw a well-dressed man in the cell, whom she had not before observed, looking on her with eyes of tenderness and compassion. She wiped away her tears, and said, with a faint smile, in answer to her father's question, that all at Brachead were supporting themselves wonderfully, and that her mother would soon be better, when she was told how well he was looking, and that he was not afraid. "She does not know I am here, or she would have tried to rise up and come with me, for she is not very ill, only weak." The prisoner spoke tenderly, but shortly, about his wife; for there was a confusion of upbraiding and remorseful thoughts in his soul. It was not, however, possible for him to withstand his beloved daughter, as her young buoyant heart, cheered by the sight and presence of her father, even although it was in prison, sent up the flushings of filial affection

and hope over all her countenance, and brightened her tears with the frequently recurring light of uncontrollable smiles. There was nothing like despondency in her father's face; and the tone of his voice was firm and unfaltering. Just before her departure, she went close up to him, whispered something into his ear, and put her hand into his breast. He started at that whisper, and then holding in his hand the guinea she had given him by stealth, said, "No, my good child, let those who imprisoned me support me;" and Margaret saw, from his frown, that she must not hope to enjoy the bliss of her filial charity.

It was, however, great relief to have seen her father; and she felt assured, from the extreme tenderness with which he had received her unexpected embrace, that she was still his "dear Margaret." Without any real cause for comfort, she still felt comforted; and was descending the steep winding street that led from the prison towards Braehead, when a touch fell upon her shoulder, and there was the gentleman whom she saw in her father's cell. He took her affectionately by the hand—and then said that he would accompany her into the country.

Margaret felt, as they walked along, as if God had sent to her an angel from heaven. The stranger told her not to allow themselves at Braehead to be too miserable about their father, for that the charge against him could not be substantiated—that most probably he would not be tried at all, but if tried, certainly acquitted. This was enough for Margaret. She never dreamt of doubting one word this benevolent person said; and, as the sun shone out as they passed through the elm-groves of the Meadows, and across the smooth verdure of Bruntsfield Links, she felt happier than she had ever done before she had known such grief and such terror. Poverty—disgrace—misery—all that could happen in this world, were as nothing, unworthy of one single fear, since she now believed that her father's life was not in jeopardy.

The stranger offered kindly to give her money; but she reminded him of her guinea which she had that morning received from a lady who had always hitherto forgotten to pay for some of Esther's baskets, and said that they could all put over very well till their father was set free. She then communicated to him every particular of their situation at Braehead; but hoped he would not tell her father more than was necessary, lest it might too much distress him in his imprisonment. "You are a good, sweet girl, Margaret,—God bless you—farewell. You say that you will visit your father again on Thursday. I will see you then. God bless you;" and, looking one moment around, he kissed her cheek, and returned to the city.

Margaret visited her father several times during the next fortnight; and either in going or returning from the prison, frequently both, she was accompanied by Mr Edwards. He was an Englishman, of no profession; but entertaining, as he told her, the same political sentiments with her father, he had formed a friendship for him, and was determined to see him through his great difficulties. His manner was kinder and kinder to Margaret every day; and he

even said to her on parting, "I must not kiss you any more, Margaret, for I am already in love. You are indeed the prettiest little maiden in all Scotland; but you are more like my daughter than my sweetheart. I only wish I were ten years younger for your sweet sake."

Margaret was in her sixteenth year; and as innocent in all her thoughts as parents could wish their child to be; but she had lived among homely people, and was not wholly ignorant of the sins and the guilt that prevail in the world; and there was something in Mr Edwards' behaviour this day which perplexed and disturbed her—something unlike his first fatherly kindness and protection. She wished that he would not again walk with her; and she did not say to her mother that she had seen him that day. She had a suspicion—not perhaps of meditated guilt—for that could not enter a heart so young, so afflicted, and so disposed to natural gratitude; but of something needless and inconsistent in his constant meeting with a poor girl like her; and which did not seem quite accounted for by the interest he took in her father's situation. Her mother was now somewhat stronger; and Margaret hoped that on her next visit to the prison they might go together; and then she should have nothing evil to fear.

They did so; but they found the wretched man pacing about his cell in a state of frantic distraction. He scarcely received his wife's quiet kiss, and then in a stern voice ordered Margaret to sit down. "You did not tell me that Edwards walked home with you every day from the prison. Alice, did she tell you?" Margaret felt the error of her concealment—neither could she say that she knew it not to be wrong. She saw by her father's enraged eyes that something was connected with her walks with Mr Edwards which she did not fully understand; and, therefore, she sat quaking and mute. "The ruffian would ruin our child, Alice:" and so saying he tore his hair, and dashed his head against the wall. "He offered me money for my Margaret, for he knew that we are desperately poor; he told me that our child loved him; and that he would make her happy and comfortable for life. A purse of gold was in my hand; but its weight was enough to sink me down to hell. I seized the villain by the throat; but the jailer rescued him; and he left the prison but a few minutes ago. Did you see him, Margaret?"—"No, father, I did not; and I hope that God will prevent one so wicked from ever coming near us again. Oh father! he said that your life was safe; and, therefore, did I indeed love him; but have no fears, father or mother, for me, for although I have many faults, I am and ever will be free from all thoughts of such sin." With these words she knelt down on the cold stone floor, with clasped hands and uplifted eyes, and exclaimed, "O God of Mercy, and Thou my gracious Redeemer! preserve me from evil, so that my parents may never be unhappy for my sake." Her sweet eyes were turned towards the vaulted stone roof of the cell; but they saw it not in the deep passion of her prayer. The soul of the affectionate child looked into heaven, and seemed to prostrate itself before the footstool of God. In her inno-

cence, her Maker was to her a benign and gracious Being, inhabiting eternity, yet, with an ear like that of an earthly benefactor, open to hear the voice of earthly anguish, and the very beatings of her agitated heart. Her father stood with his eyes fixed upon her as she knelt and prayed. Such a sight would have touched a heart of stone; but his was not so hardly framed; and perhaps, at that moment, when he looked upon his own mortal child, a weeping intercessor between him and Heaven, he remembered other more awful thoughts, and shuddered to feel that they had been wilfully banished from the bosom of him a sinner.

In an hour all their various passions were apparently allayed within the cell. The father had brought himself within the shadow of an ignominious death—had denied his Saviour, and left his sweet family in poverty. There was other unrevealed sin in his heart; but neither guilt nor agony could blind him for a moment to the horror of his daughter's pollution. Tenderly—distractedly—he kissed her on leaving the cell; and, when the fair creature and his pale wan wife disappeared, and the door shut him into his solitude, he lay down upon the floor, and drenched it, as well he might, with scalding tears; for while remorse was at work within his heart, he yet knew that the future (if his life were to be saved) was to be deeper dyed in guilt even than the past, and that he had sworn unto one who had a fatal power over him, frantic oaths to go open-eyed and headlong to perdition.

CHAPTER V.

True pity and compassion had been felt for the poor Lyndsays by all their neighbours, ever since Walter's imprisonment. For a while they called at the house as usual, and said nothing; but by degrees Alice found heart to speak of her husband's misfortune to those whom she most liked and respected, and their simple sympathy sometimes afforded her disconsolate mind an extraordinary relief. There were not wanting some who defended him, without knowing more of his alleged guilt than that he wished to make things better for poor people, and more equality in the world; but his wife knew too well that Walter was a misguided and guilty man, and such justification never yielded her any pleasure. Her chief anxiety was to know from her neighbours what they heard respecting the probable issue of his trial. In that rank of life, although there is often perhaps as much truth of feeling as in any other, there is not in general much of what is called its delicacy; and, on this occasion, several scrupled not to say plainly, but solemnly, that they feared it would go hard with Walter Lyndsay, and that his life would be taken.

At these conversations Margaret was always present; and the

thought of death at all, but especially of one violent and ignominious, is more insupportably terrible to a very young heart than it ever can be to one that has had more experience of the uncertainty and worthlessness of life. Accordingly, the grave and solemn sounds of all those voices, the gloom on all those countenances, and the passionate earnestness with which the neighbours crowded together almost every hour in small knots, evidently to know if anything further had been heard about her father—were never withdrawn from her imagination, which fed solely on fear and terror. Her life became almost insupportable; and she felt assured that, if her father were to be put to death, she also would die that moment, or lose her senses with grief and horror. Sometimes she indistinctly heard chance words from people passing by, who did not know her, that seemed to have dreadful reference to her father. When she looked towards the huge city from Braehead, she thought it always frowned now under black and thundery clouds—and that surely never, never had there been such a sunless summer. Her dreams were almost every night so dreadful, that she feared to go to bed; and at last she so carried into sleep itself her waking horror, that, as soon as the visionary scaffold arose, with her father standing upon it, and the executioner with his axe, she knew or hoped it to be a dream, and convulsively shrieked herself awake.

One evening, after a day darkened and disturbed by many hints, and hearsays, and rumours, each more shocking and fearful than another, Margaret walked by herself to Edinburgh for some medicine for her grandmother. On her return by a solitary footpath, it being then nearly dark, she met a man who came suddenly out from the old grove of Bruntsfield House. It was Edwards. She felt as if an evil spirit were at her side. The dead silence—the gloomy darkness—the solitariness—all struck a sort of superstitious fear into her heart, which she heard beating before a word was said. She then thought over the first words of the Lord's Prayer—but still her feet were rooted to the ground. The dark figure was close upon her; and her father's rage—her own dim fears of guilt, sin, and cruelty—her fervent prayer in the prison for deliverance from evil, and now a freezing horror that crept over and along her very bones, all joined together, sent a vague thought into her cold heart that some unearthly shape stood there in the gloominess, and that an evil spirit, perhaps the enemy of mankind, had sought and found out its prey; so she stood gasping and motionless, as a bird under the fascination of a serpent.

"Poor girl," said Edwards, "I see you are frightened. But do not tremble—I will do you no harm. Your father misunderstood my meaning altogether. But what will become of you—when he is dead?"

At that last word Margaret Lyndsay suddenly found her power of speech. "Since he is to die, nothing can keep my mother or myself alive—and we shall all be buried together."

"No—that cannot be. His crime is treason—and the body of a traitor is not buried."

Margaret, in the light of terror, understood his words, and almost sank to the ground.

"Your father, Margaret, is a bad man, and deserves to die. But I can save him—yes, his life is in my hands. If I appear on the day of trial, a witness for the Crown—and to save myself I should do so—no interposition can save him from judgment. But—say the word—and I will save his life."

"What word, sir?—I will say or do anything, so that you shed not my father's blood."

"Margaret Lyndsay, come and sit down with me on this bank, and fear nothing." He put his arm round her, and they sat down together. Such was the entire prostration of her soul, with all its dear affections, before the being whom she suddenly believed to have power over her father's life, that she let herself be pressed closely to his side, even with a feeling of guardianship and preservation. For, to save her father, she would have walked into the lion's den; and now desperate as her fancies had been of this person, and wicked as she knew him to be, all fear was swallowed up in filial love; and it was enough to know that he could, and perhaps would, save the life of him, the thought of whose death was distraction and indescribable agony. "Tell me, tell me," said the child, "what you can do for my father, and I will bless you for ever. Yes, I will bless you, even although you be wicked in other things; and so, also, will God forgive you, for he is a God of Mercy."—"You are very young, Margaret,—but maidens younger than you have been married before now. If you will marry me, I will hide myself—as I have done for some time—and your father shall not die." Margaret asked eagerly if he would save her father's life, and he answered "Yes."——"I will marry you if you do so—you will come to Brachead after my father's return there, and I will tell him who saved his life. I am a mere child, sir—but in a year or two I will marry you—I swear it before the great God, although I know not well what I say. My father did not know you wished to marry me."

At this time Margaret Lyndsay felt a sort of shuddering horror towards him who was thus almost unintelligibly speaking to her of marriage, but a still more hideous horror of her father's execution. The whole was like the bewilderment of a dream; and when she saw the huge black cloud of the old trees so high above them, and then felt herself drawn towards the side of this terrific disposer of life and death with what seemed an arm of iron, while all was deathlike stillness and glimmering around, she made a wild effort to leap out of the terrifying trance, and sprung suddenly to her feet. Edwards held her with a cruel grasp—and in a moment Margaret Lyndsay knew that his designs were not merciful, and that she was in the power of an unpitying ruffian.

"You must be my wife this very night, child—I will take you to my own lodgings in a secret part of the city—and you will sleep in my bosom, before witnesses—that is a marriage in Scotland." Margaret now heard his words with a different dread; for she believed now, unsuspecting though she was, that he had not the power he said

over her father's fate; or, if he had, that he was too wicked to save the life of any one. All at once she recovered her breath and strength, and became courageous even to her own surprise. She remembered her prayer to God in the prison-cell, when her father warned her against the wickedness of this very monster; and even now she called upon His holy name. She believed now that she had been waylaid for some wicked and cruel end, and that, although this man might even murder her, and bury her body at the foot of one of the old trees, he had no power to bring her father to the scaffold. That belief was sudden joy; and, strong in its inspiration, Margaret spoke aloud to the villain, and told him that he had not power to touch a hair of her father's head. Edwards, disappointed at this sudden return of her resolution, told her to remember no one was near, and that she was in his power to do with her what he wished. Her tears now fell solely for herself; and, although she quaked in the grasp of that unrelenting fiend, yet was her pure mind firmer and less disturbed, and she believed that God would yet save her from this evil. "The eye of God is never shut, and though you may kill my body, you cannot touch my soul. But, O Sir! I am very young, and am afraid to die; do not—do not hurt me. This is a terrible place, and you stand by without speaking, but with a dreadful face. Dark as the night is, I see it is dreadful. Oh spare me, spare me, a poor, young, and, on the whole, not a wicked child!" And so, shrieking out these words, Margaret fell down, nearly in a swoon—and then, half recovering herself, prayed for what she had just feared—instant death.

Two black shadows advanced from among the trees, and loud hoarse angry voices were on her ear. In a few minutes she found that Edwards was in the hands of the officers of justice. Well, Mr Spy, we have nabbed you, in spite of all your skulking. You have friends who are as good traitors as yourself; but it was not right in a reformer to seize a mere child like this, in a dark wood, for violence, and perhaps murder."—"The child of that fool, Walter Lyndsay, as I am a Christian and a thief-catcher. Margaret, did you meet him here by appointment?" Margaret, overpowered by the joy of her sudden rescue, was still lying upon the ground. One of these rude and boisterous men lifted her up, saying, "I hae a bit lassie o' my ain at hame;" and, blessing God for her deliverance, Margaret hurried away along the footpath, and in a short time was at Braehead, by the bedside of her grandmother.

CHAPTER VI.

Walter Lyndsay was never brought to trial. It appeared that he had been made the dupe of designing men in a superior station; and as some of them were under indictment of High Treason, the poor printer was liberated from prison. The heavy nailed door was

opened, and he was turned out into the street without a single hiss or huzza, and unobserved by the few persons passing along on their own business.

The infatuated man had not the virtue to go straight to his own family at Braehead. Perhaps he was ashamed to show himself to the neighbours in daylight, skulking home in contempt and poverty; so, at least, he tried to persuade himself, and said inwardly, that it was better to wait till the dusk of the evening; but that was not the cause of his conduct. He then walked sullenly down a narrow lane near the prison, and, ascending a dark narrow winding stone stair, knocked at a garret-door. It was cautiously opened by a female hand, and he entered that room in which he had first become a hopeless and infatuated sinner.

The woman who had lived for some months in this garret had been either the wife or the mistress—(she said the wife)—of one of Walter's brother reformers. He had treated her with great brutality, and having once struck her a blow on the bosom, Walter chid him, and thereby excited first his anger, and then his jealousy. But there is no need to give the history of Walter's unfortunate and wicked connection with this unprincipled female. Suffice it to say, that her husband left her, and that this weak man, believing that her desertion had been owing solely and entirely to himself, thought he was bound in honour, for by this time he had abandoned his religion, to give her protection, if he could not give her support. She loved him with a violent and engrossing passion, for Walter Lyndsay was a handsome man, and his manner and deportment far above the common level. Nor was she without talents, and something that was amiable about her disposition; she had also a fine person, a face singularly elegant, and a natural fascination that seemed just adapted to seduce into sin a mind and a heart so distracted, and it may almost be said so depraved, as those of Walter Lyndsay had been for two or three years. She indeed loved him better than she did any other man, and she had been faithful to her paramour, even in uttermost destitution of the common necessaries of life. Of his wife and family she never had suffered him to speak; at their names her eyes seemed to burn with shame, anger, and hatred, and then would overflow with bitter and scalding tears. To her bosom he had now gone on his liberation from prison, and he told her truly that he had not yet spoken a word to any one else since he had left his cell. She embraced him eagerly, and pressed his body to hers—both emaciated—for a garret had been her prison; and if pride had made Walter abstemious in his cell, so had necessity kept from her lips all but water and a crust.

The jailer had put into Walter's hand, as he let him out of the prison, a couple of guineas, which he had got for that purpose from some one of the more generous reformers. So the wretched pair had a love-feast, regaled themselves with meat and wine, and were merry. They swallowed them in recklessness and despair, with ghastly laughter between, and fatal embraces. All the world seemed changed for ever to the eyes of Walter Lyndsay. His character and

credit were utterly ruined in Edinburgh—he saw no possibility of being able to support his family by any exertion there—his domestic peace had long been destroyed—entirely, as he felt, by his own guilt. She for whom he had made that wretched sacrifice, had her arms round his neck, and her cheek on his;—and long infatuated, and now maddened by a thousand passions, he started up, and offered to go with her to some distant place—to live, if they could, by his trade, however poorly—if they could not, to die of starvation. "The sooner the better, perhaps, we die," groaned out Walter; "but let us swear never to part till that hour—Let us swear, not by the Bible, on which fools may pledge their faith, but on your forehead—and on mine, which is rending with pain, but which may this night ache no more, when resting, as it has often done, upon your bosom." They grasped each other by the hands — vowed eternal truth—and agreed to take their departure next day. Meanwhile, he said, he would go to Brachead and bid farewell to his family, to prove to her the inflexible determination of his heart. Love, vanity, pride, madness, delusion, and sin heaved the breast of the friendless, forlorn, deserted, impassioned, and beautiful woman, at these evil and wicked words; and, fearless now of the power of his wife and children, she offered to accompany him to Brachead—to wait at a little distance till he came back to her from his farewell to the inmates—and then to go with him to face poverty and death.

It was late when he reached the door of his own house; and, had not his brain been inflamed with wine into a temporary madness, there was not wickedness enough in his breast to have suffered him to put his desperate purpose into execution. He violently threw open the door, and entered with a face on which the flush of debauchery looked fearful on the wan and ghastly hue brought there by the blue damps of a stone cell. Alice and Margaret were sitting together, beside a small turf fire; but neither of them could move on this great and sudden joy. They had known he was not to die; but they had expected everlasting expatriation. Now he stood before them in his own house—by the light of his own fire—and their hearts died within them. A sigh—a groan—a gasp, was his only welcome. He well knew the cause of such silence, but he determined to misunderstand it, that he might, by his own injustice and cruelty, fortify the savage resolution of his soul. "What kind of a reception is this for a husband or a father returning from long, cruel, and unjust imprisonment? But it matters not. I am come hither for a few minutes to say farewell to you all.—Edinburgh is no place for me.—You both know that I will send you all the money I can. But I must leave this to-night.—So, wife, give me you hand:—I hope you are glad I am set free."

These words struck upon their hearts just as they were recovering from the shock of joy. They both hung down their heads, and, covering their faces with their hands, both sorely wept. The infatuated man sat down between them, and spoke with a little more gentleness. But still his words were so hurried, and his looks so wild, that each thought within herself, that his confinement or his

liberation had affected his reason; and both likewise hoped, that, for a little while only, it might be even so. But soon they were sure that he was lost to them, perhaps for ever; for there came a sterner expression over his countenance; and, in speaking of his departure, he used fewer words, but these were calm, unequivocal, and resolved. "I have sworn, and I will keep to my oath, in face of persecution, and poverty, and death, to leave this accursed Edinburgh, and all that belong to it. I will send you money when I can. But you have been able to support yourselves for some time. Alice—don't attempt to utter one word.—I will, and must go.—What, Margaret, will you dare to lift up a look or a word against your father?" Margaret had risen from her stool, on which she had for years sat at night by her father's knees. But his stern voice stopped her, as she was about to take his hand, and beseech him not to leave them all in despair. She remained motionless, with her pale and weeping face leaning towards him, almost in fear, while her mother sat still, covering her face, and knowing that all was lost.

At that moment all eyes were turned from the fitful glimmering of the peat-fire, towards the door of the small room in which the old woman lay, and which seemed slowly opening of itself. "God have mercy upon us!" said Walter Lyndsay, as his mother, who had been so long bedridden and palsy-stricken, came trembling and tottering towards them, with her long grey locks hanging over her dim eyes and withered cheeks, and her hands held up in angry and melancholy upbraiding of her sinful son. "If thou leavest thy wife and children, Walter, take with thee the curse of thy mother, along with the curse of thy conscience and the curse of thy God!" And with these words, she, who had till this moment been for years a palsied cripple, fell down upon the floor, and, without motion or groan, lay as if she were dead.

It all passed in a moment of wonder and amazement; but the apparent corpse was soon lifted up and laid upon its bed. Alice and Margaret were busy in trying to restore her to life—hoping it might be but a swoon, from the grievous fall. Her miserable son, seeing that she was dead, rushed out of the house, with her curse yet shrieking in his ears—and knew that in this world his misery was perfect.

CHAPTER VII.

Margaret Lyndsay, as soon as she missed her father by the bedside, flew out of the little room, and thence into the open air, with a palpitating bosom. She saw no figure; but, listening intensely, she heard the sound of hurried steps, which she instantly pursued. She soon caught sight of his shadow, and then discovered her father distractedly plunging down into one of the little broomy glens that intersected the slope of the hill. Onwards she flew as on wings,

passionately calling upon him; but he was so lost in the multitude of the miserable thoughts within him, that he heard not his daughter's voice. Of his own accord he stopped abruptly in the little hollow which his children had named "The Lintwhite's Nest"—when Margaret, springing down the bank, half on her knees and half clinging round him, cried out, "O father! father! my dearest father—come back—come back, I beseech you in the name of the Almighty; for my grandmother is dead, and my mother herself looks as if she were dying."

The wretched man stood speechless, but frowning. He had hoped that he had escaped from the power of that dreadful scene, and was left at liberty to rush into destruction. But as he flew, in distraction, from his mother's curse, he was arrested by his daughter's blessing. The dear, soft, and tender arms of his first-born twined round him—her pale weeping face was fixed upon him—and the innocent and loving creature's voice penetrated into the utter darkness of his soul. He kissed her many times, and held her long unto his heart, that it might feel the last close pressure of that bosom which had never cherished one unfilial thought, and which he was now going to leave unprotected amidst all the misery and wickedness of an afflicted and reckless world. And who had cursed him?—His own mother, whom, upon the day his father died, he had taken under just and natural protection. The very words, which she had calmly spoken on that day by the bedside of her dead husband, now recurred to him with horrible distinctness—words of love and gratitude—and his own truly filial reply. Was he the same man? And how had Satan entered into and corrupted his heart, till all its best and most deeply-rooted feelings were tainted and withered—root, leaf, branch, and stem—and his whole being given over to profligacy and perdition? He glared upon the creature before him—and scarce could believe that it was his own child—whom he had loved so entirely—whom he yet loved, not as before, with calm pleasure, but with the sore distraction of guilt; and first stamping upon the ground, and then softly laying his quivering hand upon her head, he muttered- -

"Go back, go back, Margaret, and I will follow by-and-by; a friend is to meet me here whom you must not see—Go back, and tell your mother that I will return to Braehead." Margaret withdrew from his embrace, and, almost incredulous, kept her beseeching eyes fixed upon him; for the lie of his heart dashed his countenance with the sallow hue of falsehood, and he trembled from head to foot. He knew that he was deceiving her in whom there was no deceit—deserting her whom God had given—breaking for ever the bonds which love, virtue, and religion have made most holy; and all this for the sake of a passion that was almost unmixed misery, and wholly unmixed guilt—for the sake of a being abandoned and excommunicated, whose beauty was a bane, and whose affection had blighted both his and her hopes in this world and the world to come.

Margaret knew not, could not know, all the convulsions in her father's heart. But she knew that he whom she had always honoured,

revered, and yet loved with yearning tenderness, was afflicted with a strange sorrow, and abandoned to some incomprehensible sin. She watched his changing countenance—she hung upon the contortions of his frame—and the glitter of his eyes, and the groans that heaved his breast. Again she rushed into his embrace, and sobbed out the name of her mother, and Esther, and poor Marion ; and then implored and beseeched him, by her own love and her own grief, and by all the undeserved kindness and fondness he had always shown her—at meals—at prayer—and in her bed, when he came every night to kiss her—to return to his house, and to be happy, in spite of all the misery that had ever afflicted him, with her mother and them all, who would live and die for him—for him who had supported them all, and who had ever been, and ever would be, the best and most loving of all fathers.

There was now a third person in the little glen—and a voice somewhat hollow, but not without feminine softness, said,—"Walter, Walter, what is this? Is she your child? Order her home."—Margaret left her father's bosom, and saw, in the clear moonlight, the tall stately figure of that woman. She at first drew herself back as in fear, for the bold bright eyes abashed her ; and she also knew, in her inmost heart, that this was the wicked person who had deluded her father, and brought all their misery into Brachead. A holy anger warmed her blood when she beheld the adulteress kiss her father's cheek ; and she stepped forward unawed, and bold in the purity of nature. "Why do you wile away our father frae us? My mother is his wife, and loves him far better than ever you can do. His mother is lying yonder alone—dead on the bed. He has a blind lassie, and another that is an innocent ; and our mother has long been weak, and not able to work. I say, then, go your ways—for the commandments of God are against you, and He will not spare them who work iniquity."

Margaret Lyndsay had a sweet mild face—eyes of softest hazel—and the very spirit of gentleness breathed over her light auburn hair. But now there came a flash from the offended sanctity of her innocence, that for a while struck into that bad woman's heart. "Are you not afraid of the great God, whose eye is now upon us?" And so saying, she looked up to the heavens, where the moon was shining without a cloud, and whose blue serene face was sparkling with many thousand stars. There was deep and wide silence—only the sighs of this innocent child and the groans of her wicked father. They came faster and faster—louder and louder. Margaret, beginning to hope that he was at last relenting, again folded him in her embraces, and strove gently to draw him towards her, and towards their deserted home. "Go away, woman—and may God bless you : you have not the face of one that is very cruel. We all will bless you—and, poor as we are, you never shall want while we can work. Our prayers will do something, perhaps, if they are sincere, which they will be ; and God will take pity on you and forgive you, if you will not kill us all—for without our father must we indeed all die of grief."

His paramour now began to dread that Walter Lyndsay might be lost to her; and, fiercely grasping Margaret's arm, tore her from his side, and flung her with violence away, till she fell upon the bank. "Did you fix this meeting with your brat to insult the woman you have ruined? Was your throat stuffed with lies when I gave you all those endearments at parting but half an hour ago, and do you send this bosom for food to the worms?" With these words she tore open her bosom—and the infatuated man laid down his head upon it. "Cursed be the hour, Walter, that your head first lay there—for you know that till then I was innocent. But go home—go home—and let me be buried—like a pauper and a prostitute—for you have made me both. No—not that—for I am true to you as the worm that never dies is true to an evil conscience." Margaret Lyndsay was sitting on the ground, stunned, and with her hands before her eyes; and, when she dared again to look up, she saw only footsteps that had dashed and trampled the thick dews—her father and his Evil Spirit had disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

Margaret continued sitting for a while, all by herself, and utterly disconsolate, in that little moonlit glen. During many a sweet sunny day, of many a long, long summer—for heretofore almost all the whole year had been summer to her—had she, and her brother, and her sister, and her companions, pursued their harmless plays among these brooms, hollows, green knolls, and hawthorn thickets. Not unfrequently had her father come, and joined them in the summer evenings, on his late return from his work in the town; and on the very last King's Birthday, he had helped them to seek out the few yellow branches of the early-blossomed broom for garlands, to welcome that pleasant festival, in the very place where he had now deserted herself, her mother, and them all.

But the calamity that had befallen them was too great to bear long reflection in the mind of a solitary girl, in such a solitary place. The thought of her mother's misery went quite through her heart; and Margaret asked herself why she was sitting so long idly there, when she was so much wanted at their unhappy home. She had left the dead—quiet now, and needing no attendance, for the sake of the living—disturbed, and sorely requiring what in madness he had spurned. She had done her duty, but she knew it not, for it was in a mental agony of passion that she had flown to him; and now it was in the last exhaustion of her heart that she crept back to the house of her widowed mother and her orphan sisters.

She stopped for a moment at the door, to wipe the tears away that had stained her cheeks, and to tie up her long hair that had fallen down when that woman so cruelly dashed her to the ground, and,

as she was about to lift the latchet, she heard the sound of voices in the house. Her mother had come to the threshold to look out for her daughter, and she now put her finger to her lips to enjoin silence. Margaret went in, and found several neighbours in the house, whom her mother had brought to look on the body of the old woman, lest any life remained. They were sitting solemnly, but not sadly, and without tears, for tears are seldom shed by the poor over the corpse of threescore and ten. Margaret saw at once that there was death; and she walked into her grandmother's room. How different a sight from that which she had just left! No disturbance here—no ghastly contortions of countenance—no blackening frowns—no miserable eyes; but perfect peace—features overspread with a serene beauty—and lids shut as if in a happy dream. The expression of that countenance was far milder now in death than it had ever been in life. All the gentlest and sweetest qualities of her soul, and it had many such, alone seemed to survive there. All that was hard, or stern, or austere, had passed away; there was nothing to mar the passionless beauty of the venerable dead. So Margaret bent forward and kissed the still, saintlike image; her whole soul was at once quieted within her, and she knelt down in prayer.

Nor did the deserted wife seem less wonderfully supported. She had been sitting by the deathbed of the mother of her husband, when that husband was leaning his head on a harlot's bosom. A few moments before that mother died, Alice had raised her head upon the pillow, and thought she saw sense within her glazed eyes. "Oh! take your curse off your son!" did she keep repeating, over and over again, with a piteous voice. The deathlike image heard the meaning; and, "O God of my fathers, forgive and bless my Walter!" were her last and indistinct words. Then, indeed, was a weight, hard to be borne, taken off that conjugal heart; and now that the one was dead, and the other worse than dead, yet was she, in the elevation of her unconscious virtue, almost happy, and never more than at that dismal hour humbly thankful to Heaven.

Two of the neighbours wished to remain all night in the house; but their kindness was acknowledged and declined. There was at present no further service to be done for the dead—blind Esther and helpless Marion were fast asleep—and both mother and daughter longed to be left to themselves. They accompanied their good neighbours to the door; one of whom, on parting, said, looking up, "Oh! but her soul has departed on a bonny quiet night—a' nature, baith heaven and earth, is at rest!"

When the door was shut for the night, her mother calmly bid Margaret sit down beside her, and asked her to tell what had happened to her during her absence. It had been one of the first lessons instilled into the child's mind never to tell a lie; and she now narrated, as far as she could, all that she had seen and heard. Few questions were put to her—for the broken-hearted wife and widow wished not to hear from such young and innocent lips more than was necessary to let her fully understand the extent of her desolation. Neither did she break out into any exclamations of grief or

anger. Had she herself been forced to witness any part of what her daughter had seen, indignation would doubtless have mingled with a bitter sense of wrong and insult, and her blood might have boiled while misery wrung out her tears. But she had long known that there was guilt; and now, that it had fallen to the lot of her own daughter to witness and reveal it, it was not fitting to use angry expressions towards a father in hearing of such a child; and therefore, while she solemnly condemned the sin, most tenderly did she spare the sinner.

It was right now that she should admit Margaret to her nearest and closest confidence; for on her affectionate and virtuous nature the orphan family was henceforth in a great measure to depend. So she told her more than she had ever done of her own early life—the affecting circumstances of her marriage—her husband's perfect kindness for many years—a kindness which had unceasingly embraced them all, old and young, till bad men had sown irreligious thoughts in his heart, and then he forsook his own cheerful fireside and quiet bed, till, lapse after lapse, known only to his own soul, he at last had fallen away utterly from God, and, lo! the miserable end. Then, indeed, did Alice break forth into lamentation. The green fields about her father's house—all her simple, innocent, and happy life about that quiet farm, laborious as it had been—her father's sudden death—Walter Lyndsay's compassion and love for her, an orphan—his disinterested affection for one who was so poor—their many blessed years, when everything within doors, and without, went to their heart's desire—all came upon her with a weight not to be borne, and she wondered at the wickedness, the alteration, and the decay.

Margaret sat still, and said nothing; but not a word—not a tone of her mother's voice—not a sigh nor a tear escaped her heart. Hitherto her whole cares and anxieties (and for one so young she had had not a few) had been for the present hour or day; but now she saw that there was a future belonging to this life, and that she must never more be only a thoughtless, laughing, happy girl, but even sad, if not sorrowful, like her beloved mother. She felt satisfied in her innocent mind that she had already had too, too much joy; and when she thought of that dreadful scene in the little glen, and then beheld her mother's resignation taking quiet place of that distracted grief, she drew her stool nearer to her side, and almost in an ecstasy of filial love told her to fear nothing, for that she herself, although young and ignorant, felt strong in the fear of God.

It was now past midnight, and the last sparks of the peat-fire, which one of the neighbours had renewed unasked during the affliction, had quite gone out in the ashes. But the moon and stars had filled the room with so much clear light, that mother and daughter had seen distinctly each other's faces, and knew therein that neither of them was sorely afraid of the future, with all its inevitable ills. "I will sleep with you to-night," said Margaret, with a sudden sob; for she had lain every night, for a month past, on the bed where those other old lifeless limbs were now stretched in their coldness. So she assisted her worn-out mother to her bed, and they lay down together, with their arms across each other's breast. In a few

minutes gracious nature gave up the soul of the child to sleep; and her face, so perfectly free from every touch of sin in the deep beauty of its repose, comforted the aching heart of the widow, as often and often before morning she sat up disturbedly in her bed, and clasped her hands in an agony of pity and despair, for the sake of him who had gone away, never again, most probably, to see her in this life.

CHAPTER IX.

A "FATHERLESS FAMILY" are two melancholy words, and here there were many things to deepen their meaning, even to the most cold-hearted. The Lyndsays had always been in a condition of life somewhat above the common, and had for many years been looked upon as a perfect pattern of domestic virtue, respectability, and happiness, by every one not only in Brachead but over all the parish. Slight symptoms of internal sorrow and decay had now and then been visible to a few more observant eyes, in the neglected and weedy state of their little garden, formerly the neatest and richest of all, and in the pale faces and downcast eyes of mother and daughter, so unlike their customary expression of gaiety and contentment. Then bad rumours were afloat of a cruel husband and an improvident father, till guilt was publicly and ineffaceably branded upon his name, and the best man in the village, first incarcerated like a felon, had next vanished like a ghost. Then that venerable old woman, who had sat for years in her chair at her busy wheel, till, palsy-stricken, her foot and hand were numbed into rest, and to turn over the leaves of her Bible was as much as she could do, dropped the body and disappeared. The son, a boy whom everybody had liked, was far away, or dead, perhaps given to evil courses. The poor blind lassie was not heard singing so constantly as she used to do, and she seldom finished a single song; now a verse of something plaintive, and immediately after a frolicsome and comic strain, stop short of a sudden, as if it were frozen within her heart. That other harmless creature alone was unchanged. Sometimes she would ask, with a momentary sadness on her earnest face, for her father and her grandmother; but a word pacified her, and she would scarcely have known the difference, had she been told that the one had gone to bliss in heaven, and that the other was wandering in misery on the earth.

It is a hard and painful thing to inhabit a house where one has been perfectly happy, after all that constituted that happiness, or on which it entirely depended, is for ever gone. And it is worst of all, when the change has been wrought, not by death, but by sin. So felt this deserted woman, when she looked up to the sheltering trees, and across the little gardens and glens of Brachead. This had been her Paradise, when hither she came after her marriage. Here had

all the children been born, and their voices and their laughter had filled all the air around, each succeeding year, with more various and intermingled sounds. But now the place was stripped of all that made it Braehead, and a new character brought dismally over it, of melancholy, shame, and despair. To live there was impossible; yet the widow looked on her orphans, and wished not for a while to die.

She communicated to Margaret her intention of taking a very low-rented dwelling, in some one of the obscure lanes of the town, where they might be able, by their united work, to earn a subsistence; and perhaps, by-and-by, to open a reading and sewing school for the children of their poor neighbours. Margaret heard the proposal with a cheerful mind. She felt that she had no right to remain at Braehead; and therefore she crushed at once all such wishes in her heart. A new destiny awaited her, in which, as long as her mother remained tolerably strong, and she had her own health, there was nothing in the least appalling or repulsive. On the contrary, they would be all living together, unobserved and quiet by themselves. "We never hear," she would say, "my dear mother, of any families really dying of want, and many support themselves without parents at all. There is no fear of us; let us have our house in the ugliest darkest lane, if there it will be cheapest; and we shall be as happy, and happier too, than many who live in the grandest streets or squares."

Walter Lyndsay had deserted his family towards the end of August: time crept on over the floor of the house of affliction, and it was now the third week in November. The house which the widow was about to leave had been the property of an old man in comfortable circumstances, who, on hearing of their misfortunes, had instantly agreed to remit their half-year's rent altogether, or to take it when it might be convenient for them to pay the sum. But he died—and his heir, being a stranger and in difficulties, the rent of four pounds was rigorously demanded. All the furniture, except one bed, a table, and two or three chairs, had been already sold, week after week; and to raise the sum of four pounds seemed to be impossible. But a few days before the term-day, a neighbour woman, who had been married about the same time with Alice, had lived all along at Braehead, and had been familiar in the house, both in happiness and affliction, came in and sat down, with an air of absence and of restraint.—"Hae you ony bad news to tell me?" said the easily alarmed widow; "if sae, dinna fear to speak. Whatever be the will o' God that I should bear, He will give me strength for the burden. Is my Walter dead?"—"No, no, Alice—I ken naething about the puir man sin' he left Braehead—God bless him; but you are the only widow woman, as ane may say, in the town; and we hae heard about this sair distress o' the rent. We hae a' subscribed—our husbands, oursels, and some o' the bit bairns too; and here is four pound. May it do nae guid to him who clawts it out o' the widow's house."

Alice had shed no tears for some weeks past—they had all settled down into her heart. But when she looked at the worthy woman who was herself so poor, and saw the purse in her lap—a sense of that great kindness from those who had so little to spare smote her,

and she wept. The sweet and benign spirit of humanity yet existed for her, the deserted and widowed one; and something that she thought had been withered and dead for ever began to stir within her heart; something like joy in life, and a secret wish for its prolongation. "Yes, Sarah, I will take it;—and well thou knowest, and all my other friends, that 'they who give unto the poor lend unto the Lord!"

The twenty-fourth day of November came at last—a dim, dull, dreary, and obscure day, fit for parting everlastingly from a place or person tenderly beloved. There was no sun — no wind — no sound in the misty and unechoing air. A deadness lay over the wet earth, and there was no visible heaven. Their goods and chattels were few; but many little delays occurred, some accidental and more in the unwillingness of their hearts to take a final farewell. A neighbour had lent his cart for the flitting, and it was now standing loaded at the door, ready to move away. The fire, which had been kindled in the morning with a few borrowed peats, was now out—the shutters closed—the door was locked—and the key put into the hand of the person sent to receive it. And now there was nothing more to be said or done, and the impatient horse started briskly away from Braehead. The blind girl, and poor Marion, were sitting in the cart—Margaret and her mother were on foot. Esther had two or three small flowerpots in her lap, for in her blindness she loved the sweet fragrance and the felt forms and imagined beauty of flowers; and the Innocent carried away her tame pigeon in her bosom. Just as Margaret lingered on the threshold, the Robin redbreast, that had been their boarder for several winters, hopped upon the stone seat at the side of the door, and turned up its merry eyes to her face. "There," said she, "is your last crumb from us, sweet Roby, but there is a God who takes care o' us a'." The widow had by this time shut down the lid of her memory, and left all the hoard of her thoughts and feelings, joyful or despairing, buried in darkness. The assembled group of neighbours, mostly mothers with their children in their arms, had given the "God bless you, Alice! God bless you, Margaret, and the lave!" and began to disperse; each turning to her own cares and anxieties, in which, before night, the Lyndsays would either be forgotten, or thought on with that unpainful sympathy which is all the poor can afford or expect, but which, as in this case, often yields the fairest fruits of charity and love.

A cold sleety rain accompanied the cart and the foot travellers all the way to the city. Short as the distance was, they met with several other flittings, some seemingly cheerful, and from good to better —others with woebegone faces, going like themselves down the path of poverty, on a journey from which they were to rest at night in a bare and hungry house. And now they drove through the suburbs, and into the city, passing unheeded among crowds of people, all on their own business of pleasure or profit—laughing, gibing, shouting, cursing—the stir, and tumult, and torrent of congregated life. Margaret could hardly help feeling elated with the glitter of all the shining windows, and the hurry of the streets. "Safe us, what a noisy

town is this Edinburgh!" said blind Esther; "and yet hear till that woman singing ballads. Waes me, but she has a sair cracked voice, and rins out o' the tune a' thegither." Marion sat silent, with her pigeon warm in her breast below her brown cloak, unknowing she of change of time or of place, and reconciled to sit patiently there, with the soft plumage touching her heart, if the cart had gone on, through the cold and sleet, to midnight.

The cart stopped at the foot of a lane too narrow to admit the wheels, and also too steep for a laden horse. Two or three of their new neighbours—persons in the very humblest condition, coarsely and negligently dressed, but seemingly kind and decent people—came out from their houses at the stopping of the cart-wheels, and one of them said, "Ay, ay, here's the flitting, I'se warrant, frae Brachead. Is that you, Mrs Lyndsay? Hech, sirs, but you've gotten a nasty cauld wet day for coming into Auld Reekie, as you kintra folks ca' Embro—Hae ye had ony tidings, say ye, o' your gudeman since he gaed aff wi' that limmer?—dool be wi' her and a' siclike." Alice replied kindly to such questioning, for she knew it was not meant unkindly. The cart was soon unladen, and the furniture put into the empty room. A cheerful fire was blazing, and the animated and interested faces of the honest folks who crowded into it, on a slight acquaintance, unceremoniously and curiously, but without rudeness, gave a cheerful welcome to the new dwelling. "I thocht ye wadna be the waur o' a bit fire—so, though ye gied me nae orders, I raked thegether a wheen shavings, and wi' ane o' Jock's spunks I soon made a bleeze. They're your ain coals, and the lum's a grand drawer in a' win's.—I kent that in Mr Jamieson's time; for he often used to say that he hadna a smoky house, although aiblins he might hae a scolding wife."—"Haud your tongue, you tawpie," cried another of the gossips; "here's a dram for the carter—the whisky's unco gude the noo at Tam Speirs's. Take it aff, man, and Mrs Lyndsay maun pree't hersel'." In a quarter of an hour the beds were laid down—the room decently arranged—one and all of the neighbours said "Gude-night," and the door was closed upon the Lyndsays in their new dwelling.

They blessed and eat their bread in peace. The Bible was then opened, and Margaret read a chapter. There was frequent and loud noise in the lane, of passing merriment or anger; but this little congregation worshipped God in a hymn, Esther's sweet voice leading the sacred melody, and they knelt together in prayer. It has been beautifully said by one whose works are not unknown in the dwellings of the poor,—

> "Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep!
> He, like the world, his ready visit pays
> Where fortune smiles;—the wretched he forsakes;
> Swift on his downy pinions flies from woe,
> And lights on lids unsullied with a tear."

Not so did Sleep this night forsake the wretched. He came like moonlight into the house of the widow and the fatherless, and, under

the shadow of his wings, their souls lay in oblivion of all trouble, or perhaps solaced even with delightful dreams.

CHAPTER X.

The weakest and most discontented minds are often very suddenly and wonderfully reconciled to an adverse change of fortune. Affliction seems to find some ore in the dross of the most worthless nature; and they who may have felt poor in prosperity, sometimes discover themselves in adversity to be unexpectedly rich. There are many things to catch at to break our fall even from the high places of life into its very lowest; and when the sufferers recover from the blow that at first may have stunned them, they see many small bounties and blessings lying about within their reach, sufficient to sustain both life and happiness.

Margaret Lyndsay and her mother brought with them meek virtues, a lowly wisdom, and a deep spirit of faith, into this their sorely altered condition of life; and a few weeks had not passed over their heads till they not only were perfectly reconciled to their two rooms in this dark and even noisome lane, but happier than they had ever been at Brachead since their desertion. Everything about, around, and above them, was indeed miserably changed; and the pleasant objects that had formerly contributed so much to their happiness, were not only gone from before their eyes, but things dreary or loathsome were in their place. Yet the few flowers they had brought with them, rooted in some of the earth of Brachead, although sickly, were still alive: and high up beyond the overhanging roof that darkened the lane, was sometimes seen a narrow slip of the bright blue sky. But all within their house and their hearts was unchanged and unchangeable. Herein lie the great and eternal sources of joy and sorrow, alike to the lofty and to the low; and when at night the little room was made snug, and clean, and comfortable—the fire beeted—the shutters closed—work in hand—with tale or song—and the rain driving, or the snow falling without—blessed in that widow's dwelling was the lot of humble and unrepining virtue; and had some wandering sage been on a pilgrimage to search out Happiness, he might have found her even there sitting with her sister Sorrow, by the fireside in that obscurest tenement.

The winter had set suddenly in with extreme and unusual severity, and deep long-lying snow blocked up the lane, till it was dug through, and heaped up against the wall higher than the ground windows. Provisions and fuel were dear; and it was a severe season even for those families who were not the very poorest, and who had enough to do to procure the bare necessaries of life. It was a bad time for attempting to open the smallest school, even with the very lowest children's fees; but the attempt had been made, and about a dozen

scholars came to the house with their Bibles, seams, and samplers. That number, if their parents could pay the merest trifle a quarter, was sufficient to keep the family of their teacher alive, along with what they could otherwise earn. And there is a pride among the very poorest of the poor to pay such debts; for parents, who think of educating their children at all, are not likely to wish to do so at the expense of their own honesty, and at another's loss.

Before Christmas the Lyndsays were known and respected, not only in their own lane, but throughout several adjacent streets. The parents of the children soon saw that they learned there nothing but what was right and good. When at school, they were kept warm at a fireside, and out of the way of all harm; and even those parents who were themselves too careless of human duties, or of their duties to their Creator, could not but be pleased to see their children more quiet and decent in their manners, less fractious and disobedient, and disposed during the long winter nights to find amusement in what was instruction, and pleasure in reading over their lessons in that Catechism and that Bible which they themselves perhaps had too much neglected. Even the idle, the base, and the dissolute, respected the inmates of the floor of that house, and gradually abstained from offering them any of those insults which thoughtless and unfeeling brutality so often takes a satisfaction in heaping upon those whom they suppose pure enough to feel, and too helpless to repel them. Much meanness, duplicity, coarseness, and vice, were daily before the eyes, and often carried into the hearts, of this harmless and industrious family; but the minds even of the young, as long as they feel the happiness and the sanctity of innocence, remain pure amidst pollution—to them contact is not contagion—much is seen and heard which they do not understand; and from the sins that nature in her greatest purity must know, there is found a preservative in the simple joy of that virtue which is strong in the consciousness of being pleasant in the eyes of God.

The very cares, and troubles, and anxieties of her little school, were all of a kind to lead away the thoughts of the widow from her own misfortunes. The teasing ways of the careless and obstinate imps forced her to exert herself, and even called out at times exercises of patience, and occasioned slight irritations of temper, that made her wonder with a sigh how she who had suffered such great evils could be affected by trifles like these. By degrees she felt an interest—a pride—even a selfishness in her humble and useful trade; and the very airs of the schoolmistress, so necessary to uphold her authority among these urchins, fortified her heart against the intrusion of formidable recollections. So powerful over misery are the occupations of utility or innocence! Margaret, too, delighted in her little school-room. She saw, with deep satisfaction, that it was restoring her mother to peace of mind; and as for herself, she in whose heart love did by nature overflow, soon bestowed it on one and all, even the least winning of her childish pupils. Above all, not an hour in the day was left unoccupied; and thus, after a bust-

ling morning and busy afternoon, came on a joyful evening and a tranquil night.

Occupied as they thus were almost continually, yet they had their leisure for amusement, and for deeper happiness. Occasionally a neighbour from Brachead came dropping in, bringing with her a crowd of recollections, which were now not only easy but delightful to bear. Brachead itself none of them had yet ventured to revisit. Their town-neighbours, too, had sometimes their own fireside parties; for mirth is not afraid of misery, and joy will laugh before the jaws of poverty opening to devour. Then the Sabbath came, and church-bells were ringing all over the wide city. Too much in such cities are the ordinances of religion apt to be neglected or scorned. But multitudes still feel their power; and if it be true that sometimes "those who scoff remain to pray," how much oftener must those do so likewise who have entered the House of God in mere carelessness, or with some light purpose or design? This poor widow, with her daughter Margaret, blind Esther, and also she who being so stricken could know no sin, went regularly every Sabbath to some church, and sat down wherever they could find a seat, in passage or in pew, or in window-seat; or they stood humbly at the door, and received into their hearts the weekly restoration of Christianity. Perhaps no one looked at them, nor knew who they were; or haply Margaret's meek beauty, so poorly arrayed, touched some stranger with pleasure during the time of prayer or psalm, or Esther's sweetest voice made some to look towards the dim and retired place from which that blind musician was pouring forth the rich song of praise.

Margaret Lyndsay, too, had some companions about her own age. Her young heart yearned towards happy creatures like herself; and what better was she than those around her, that they might not claim her friendship? Her mother trusted to her own nature to form intimacies, and as yet saw nothing to cause anxiety. Pretty Mary Mitchell was her dearest friend, of respectable parents, and living beneath their own roof; and although she was gay and thoughtless, these surely were no sins in one not seventeen years old; and she could not be gayer than her own Margaret once was, before care and an awful sense of duty saddened her, and slackened the quickness of her lightsome footsteps. Therefore, on a Saturday night, Mary was always a welcome visitor at their fireside.

While the winter was thus passing away, with its long nights, and a perfect reconcilement had grown in the minds of them all to their new life, Esther became to her mother and sister an object of solemn sympathy and commiseration. She had received from Nature a thoughtful mind and deep feelings; and left so much alone to her own meditations as she necessarily was, her soul disturbed itself, in the absence of all outward objects, with its own workings. She became sad and sadder every day, and at last appeared plunged in a deep and dark melancholy. The tears were often seen pouring from her white sightless eyes; and she frequently moaned, and even got up and walked in her sleep. She was overheard praying God to forgive

her sins—and hoping, in uttermost agony, that she was not too wicked to be saved.

Her mother and Margaret knew that she had been with them at church several times, when a severe and gloomy preacher had dwelt on some of the most awful mysteries of Christianity; and his denunciations of Divine vengeance on unrepentant sinners, and all who knew not the utter wickedness of their fallen nature, had gone far down into the silence of the blind creature's soul. What could they do to comfort her? In their simplicity they knew not how to deny that the words of that dreadful preacher were true; yet they could not endure to witness the fear of the innocent Esther, who, partaking as she did of human corruption, had yet never injured one of God's creatures, and could not, as they hoped and believed, have done or thought anything to deserve His wrath. They now never suffered her to be alone, and tried to occupy her tender heart with former remembrances of Brachead, or with thoughts of others' happiness or misery. But her soul turned away from all such things—and, brooding over itself, bewailed its own sinfulness, and trembled at the wrath to come. This was a new and a strange affliction, and one which they knew not how religiously to overcome.

It happened, too, that there came into this lane—the abode of so much poverty, disease, ignorance, and vice—a young and amiable lady, of an opulent and respectable family, who took an interest both in the temporal and spiritual welfare of the poor. She visited the Lyndsays, and inquired into the state of their souls. She was a disciple of that powerful preacher, but one with little knowledge on subjects which it is hard for the wisest to understand. Her attention was naturally directed to the blind girl—an object interesting to a mind in search of wonders or novelties in lowly life; and Miss Ramsay, from a few dark expressions of poor Esther, immediately declared that the child was awaked to the truth. She fed her disease with ill applied and worse understood passages from Scripture, and darkened the terrors that had been long gathering in her soul. The Bible now was a book of fear, or of love in the shadow of fear—and the child looked at last as if she felt a smile to be a sin. The lady told her never again to sing any of her idle and wicked songs; and Esther repented with bitter tears, through many sleepless or haunted nights, that she had sung airs displeasing to a jealous and dreadful God.

Margaret Lyndsay thought it hard to charge her little blind sister with such sins as these; and could not help wondering that a lady, who could take the trouble of coming from a fine house into such a poor room in a dirty lane, with such beautiful and expensive clothes, should teach such very cruel Christianity. "You do not know, ma'am, our history, or you would not call Esther a sinner. The old clergyman of this parish—we are in Greyfriars—did not think her so when he visited us. He told my mother, that, when he looked on her face, he could not help thinking on our Saviour's words about the little children—'Of such is the kingdom of heaven.'"——"We have suffered much sorrow and some hardships," said the mother,

"and Esther there, I do not fear to say it before her, helped to support the family with bread by her industry, and with spiritual comfort by her holy resignation to all Heaven's decrees. Remember, madam, that the child is blind, and He who made her so will not refuse the sacrifice of a lowly and contrite heart like Esther's. She has her faults, perhaps, poor thing—though I know of none; for we are a' sinful, that is true. But saw ye, ma'am, ever ane in a' your life mair innocent than this blind lassie?"—Miss Ramsay made no reply—but shook her head, that rustled and glittered with a proud show of ribbons—put some tracts into the mother's hand, and went away.

Knowing her own ignorance, and fearful to be less alive to the holiness of God than her blind sister, Margaret ventured to knock one evening at the door of the clergyman of the parish—and found herself, with a beating heart, in the presence of the reverend old man. She told her tale in meekness and simplicity—and, with a gentle smile, he bid her go her ways. He came soon after to the little school in the lane, and spoke pleasantly and graciously, like a father, to them all. Esther felt the peaceful power of his extreme old age quieting the terrors of her quaking heart. He spoke to her, not as a child of sin, but of faith—encouraged her to believe that God was well pleased with all His children who strove to be dutiful—and reminded them that all Christ's miracles were of mercy and exceeding great love. "Did He not make clay and put it to the eyes of the blind man, Esther, till they saw the light?—and did He not rebuke those who asked if it were because of his own sin, or that of his parents, that he had been born blind? Fear not, my dear child; it is not on such as thou that the wrath of God will descend. I, an old man of fourscore, have more reason to fear God than thou. Continue to honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long on the earth that the Lord thy God hath given thee. Forget not your prayers—be glad in the Lord—and sleep, my child, on thy bed in peace!"—Esther's soul was quieted. She returned by degrees to her former serenity; and although she was not quite so gay as before, there seemed to be complete composure of heart. Neither her mother nor Margaret allowed her now to sit long by herself; for none can tell the power of silence and solitude over the blind. Margaret especially kept her sweet voice constantly in hearing of the child, whom now they loved with a deeper compassion of love; and Esther, who marked in her darkness the motives of her sister, had a pleasure in showing her by her smiles that they were understood, and that her kindness had inspired both gratitude and tranquillity.

CHAPTER XI.

The spring had now begun to show itself all round about the city, in the pleasant suburbs, the green squares, and the old courts adorned with their solitary elm-tree, or a few flowery shrubs—for it was about the middle of the variable but pleasant month of April. Little wooden boxes, with their sprouting mignonette, were to be seen at windows which the vernal airs and sunshine frequently visited through the smoke; and the old piles of building looked more cheerfully beneath the brightening azure of the sky. Birds were chirping in the more lonesome places among the congregated dwellings of men; and here and there a few yards of hawthorn hedge, preserved by accident or caprice even along the streets, gave notice to townsfolk of the beautiful spirit now bursting into life over the silent country.

The influence of the sweet season was not wholly lost on the widow and her family pent up in that darksome lane. The anemones and ranunculuses that they had brought from Brachead, had put forth a few dim blossoms; and Esther, who often enjoyed the faint perfume, asked Margaret if they were not almost as beautiful there as they had been in their own garden. The widow's heart, too, seemed to revive—her health was better—and there was a stronger, steadier tone in her speech. Their scholars had rather increased in number—they had almost all behaved well—and the faithful discharge of duty had given a satisfaction to her heart, that enabled her to think with less trouble on its own hidden and peculiar afflictions.

Her great anxiety now was about her sweet Margaret. She was now in the full beauty of her girlhood—and, retired as her industrious life was, many eyes must have seen and admired her. No doubts had her mother of her purity and innocence; but dark fears of evil coming, no one knows whence, will for ever find their way into a maternal heart, as long as there is wickedness upon the earth. She sometimes, in their most solemn hours, warned Margaret of guilt that might lie in wait for her even in holy places; and at such times the thought of her own husband would chill her very heart-blood. Margaret listened with confidence in herself, but replied without presumption; and then indeed her mother saw that her daughter's soul was too much filled with filial piety, to admit even any strong innocent affection for any human being out of their own family. She saw this, and was satisfied—although often and often the vague apprehension would, in spite of herself, return.

"As for you, Esther, if both I and Margaret were dead, you might get into the Orphan Hospital—and, as none on earth would ever seek to hurt you, you would be taken care of by one after another all your days."—"Blind lasses, mother, seldom live long, they say; and I will add one to the number of them that die young. But I am not afraid now of the next life—at least not as I used to be—although it is an awful thought. If it hadna been for that kind old man, I should hae died distracted with fear of that dreadful

world. But what makes you speak o' an Orphan Hospital, mother? No doubt they are blessed places for mony a ane—but I couldna leeve a haill day awa' frae you and Margaret. Neither o' you, wi' a' your kindness, can ken the heart o' the blind."

"Do you know, mother," said Margaret, "what is become of that Miss Ramsay that used sometimes to call on us, and who was forgetful enough to call our good Esther a sinner?"—"No, Margaret; I hope no evil."—"She has given her father—I was told yesterday by Mary Mitchell—a sore heart. She has married a wild young man in the army, and gone away to the Indies."—"I hope he will be good to her," said Esther, "for she was a kind lady, or she would never have thought of visiting the poor. But it is nine o'clock, and I maun awa' to my bed, for I was obliged to finish my mat, and I am not able to keep up my eyelids."

"I sometimes wonder within myself," said the widow, "that I have brought my mind to such forgetfulness of my Laurence. It would almost seem as if I had not a mother's heart towards him; but I can think of nae living creature but his father. I daresay my callant is dead. The yellow fever, they say, aye kills the bonny fair-haired laddies, and my Laurence was ane. He maun be dead, Margaret, or he would never hae been months and months without writing hame."—"Don't be unhappy, mother—sailors' letters often miscarry. Ye know Laurence has frequently warned us o' that, and told us not to be afraid when we happened not to hear frae him. When I pray for my brither, I always have an assurance that God is guarding him on the wide sea. What-for are you greeting, mother?" and Margaret, unable to prevent her own tears, stirred up their fire on the hearth, and said, "Let us hope the best—I would aye hope the best if I saw you mair cheerful." Her mother soon recovered her composure, and they continued to sit up a little longer, talking of ordinary things—when a quick loud knock, as of a strong hand, struck the door, and in a moment it flew open.

There he stood in his blue sailor's dress, and his face beaming with joy—their own Laurence. His mother saw him for a moment, and then darkness shut up her eyes and her soul. Margaret, who never had feared but that he would return, rose strongly from her chair, but her knees trembled before she reached his eager arms. The sailor then went tenderly up to his mother, and kissed her cheek. After a little while, her eyes again opened on her boy. "I believed you dead of the yellow fever, or drowned in some wild adventure. —I had no trust in God; but thou art alive, Laurence, and now, that I have seen thy face, could I lie down and die in peace. For thou, Laurence, wilt yet be a father to them all, and sorely may they yet want a father's care."—"I hae been at Brachead, mother, and may God bless my father wherever he may be, and whatever may be his life."—"Ay, Laurence, that is my prayer by day and by night. Whatever else others may say about him, we will all continue to bless him—poor man." Laurence wept like a very child; and or

a little while, it seemed as if this meeting had been one of grief. But it was human nature, in its strongest affections, carrying human happiness on to the very brink of suffering.

Peace was at length restored, and time allowed for question and reply. For a moment there was silence, and a soft footstep was heard coming down the stair. The blind girl had heard her brother's voice in her unsound sleep; and, slipping on her gown, came with her arms wide open towards the fire. "I thought at first it was but a dream—but here thou art, Laurence.—Oh! brother, brother, but this is sweet!"

It was yet not late in the night, and the fire was renewed. Esther ran to her bed, and put on all her clothes. The little table was set out, with cheerful voices and laughter, and covered with a napkin; and the mother said, with a face that could now smile from the heart, "My sailor must have his supper;—never, never did I hope to see thee break bread again!" Margaret soon put things into order; and saying, laughingly, "I must away for eggs and butter, and be back in a twinkling," she lifted up a little basket, and went out, casting a gleam of bliss upon the brave boy, sitting with one of his hands on his mother's lap held fast between both of hers, and the other laid gently on the head of his blind sister, now as happy as any being on the face of the whole earth.

CHAPTER XII.

As Margaret was closing the door behind her with a light heart, she observed the dark figure of a man standing under the shadow of an old staircase, just opposite their room window, the shutters of which she had that evening forgotten to shut. But thinking him merely some idle and curious person, she tripped away down the lane, saying inwardly, "Well, he saw a happy fireside." In a little, however, she heard quick footsteps following her; and as she was passing, somewhat alarmed, through a solitary court of houses almost all uninhabited, a man's heavy hand grasped her arm, and she stopped, with a short cry of fear. The person beside her seemed to be wrapped up in a great-coat, and a black handkerchief half concealed his face. Her first thought was of Edwards—the height of the figure seemed the same—and the same that unforgotten grasp that clutched her in the wood. But Edwards had been sent across seas for his crimes—and this could not be that ruffian. The hand on her arm relaxed its hold, and now touched her with gentleness, while a low broken voice said, with a groan, "Fear not, Margaret, I will not hurt you. Surely you fear not me?" That voice made her heart leap up and then die within her; for, sorely changed as it was, she could not mistake the sound which had given pure and deep joy to her heart

for so many years. It was indeed her father who spoke—and these few words were all that could yet be uttered by the miserable man.

Neither for a while could Margaret speak—she sobbed upon his breast, and kissed his hands, that were intensely cold. "Oh! blessed night," she at length exclaimed, "beyond all blessedness—God has indeed heard and granted all our prayers. O father! all has long been forgiven, and my mother will this night kneel beside her husband in prayer. And think—oh think—this very night, too, has Laurence come home!" Walter Lyndsay stood fixed to the spot, and his frame shook as with an ague. By the dim glimmer of one solitary lamp in the court, and the light of the only window that had a candle burning within, Margaret indistinctly saw her father's face. Hollow and bony it now was, and worn away by uttermost misery. No traces were now to be seen of that fierce anger that glared upon her in the little glen on the night he left his home. Fixed despair only was now there; and as she kissed his lean cheek she thought in agony, "My father is an hungered!"

"Margaret, this is a thoroughfare, and people will be passing—come with your father, for I see thou lovest him still—come with me, for a few minutes, to some more lonely place, for I must speak with thee, the best child that ever man had, shamefully and most wickedly left an orphan!" Margaret could hardly find breath to say, that whatever shame or wickedness there had been, it was all over now, and buried like a stone in the deep sea. She had put her soft arm within that of her father; he led her almost in silence out of the streets; and then ascending a few steps up the bank below the Castle rock, where nothing could interrupt them, they sat down together in the darkness. It grew somewhat less black before a word was said, for many hundred lights were burning high above them in the garrison, the city gleamed through the thick night-smoke, and something like moonshine struggled through the huge clouds that lay dense over the sky.

Her father put his arm round Margaret, and made her lean her head on his breast. It was long since one pure untroubled joy had been his; and as the soft-breathing bosom of his innocent child was felt regularly meeting the hurried beatings of his own distracted heart, he knew that in losing her he had lost an enjoyment which cannot be exceeded even within the gates of heaven.

"I arrived in Edinburgh, Margaret, at the dusk of the evening, and I came just to look, for an hour or two, at the house in which you all live. Providentially the shutters were not closed, and I saw through the clear room into the fireside. You are all quite happy—your mother looked as if she had forgiven me; and I knelt down on the stones near the window, when no one was in the lane, and asked God if He would hear the thanks of a sinful wretch like me. I started up when a sailor boy—yes, my own Laurence—came, and went in at that door which I may never enter. I beheld that meeting—and then I knew that my son had even then returned from sea.

God is indeed kind to me a sinner; for my guilt, my crimes, have fallen heavy on no head but my own, and that of the poor partner of my sin—the good, I see, are still happy."

Margaret listened to the sorrowful words and the sorrowful voice, and her heart was melted into a profound happiness; for she knew not the meaning of what her father uttered, when he said that he must never enter into her mother's house. Reconciliation—forgiveness—clasping embraces—silent prayers—and a blessed burden of sweet dreaming sleep—these were the thoughts that now filled all her soul; and she half wondered why her father held her on his bosom here in the darkness, and on the cold hill-side, when a house full of happiness was at hand—all that this life contained of joy gathered together into one small room.

"I had resolved to stand there all the night, Margaret, when you came suddenly out, and then I took courage to go and reveal myself unto you, penitent, or at least remorseful, for all my sins. But, Margaret, into that house I may not—must not go. The time is not yet come—and it never may—when I can dare to meet your mother face to face. Think not, Margaret, to say it shall now be otherwise; in a few months, if alive, I will come again, and it is possible that then I may show myself to my wife upon my knees." Margaret was lost in grief and wonder, and knew not how to speak to her father, who continued—"You know my sin, Margaret—you saw her with me. Poor woman, she has not many weeks to live; but ought I to desert her too, and on her deathbed?"—"No—no—no, father—the dying must not be deserted; but come home—come home—and my mother and I will both accompany you to the place where she is dying, wherever it may be; and we will forgive and comfort her, and say our prayers for her by her bedside."

"Oh! is there indeed in Nature such pure goodness as this? Am I, with all my cruel guilt, yet remembered and beloved by you both?—Take to your mother, Margaret, the blessings of a woeful, heart-broken, perhaps dying man—for thyself, who treatest me so tenderly, I know not what to pray. Will you not loathe me, when we part, as something odious and polluted, and wish that you had had a different kind of father?"—"I love you better than all this earth—better than if you had never left us. If you were well, and living at home again, we should all be the happiest family living. O father, father! come home, or let me first run and tell my mother what awaits her, and then come you in a few minutes to the door." He made no answer, and then said—"I left the dying woman in care of one even poorer than ourselves, and said to her that I would return on the second night. I have seen my wife, and you all; and now you must go your ways. As soon as I have buried her whom I led into sin, I will see you again, and then do whatever Alice and you wish me to do for the few months I may have to live." His daughter well knew from his hollow voice, that sounded more hollow in that wild rocky place, that her father would give her a parting kiss in that darkness, and she tried not to gainsay his resolution. "But, O father! you are white, and thin, and icy cold—have you eat any-

thing to-day? and where, where will you sleep?" "I will sleep nowhere, Margaret; but the night will have an end, and before the morning breaks, I must return whence I came, to the dwelling of sin, shame, despair, and death."

Margaret was seized with terror, that her father would sit there all the night. There was frost in the air, and the stones around them were intensely cold. She implored him to suffer her to let him into the house, when all had gone to bed, and he could come up to the room where she and Esther slept. Nobody would see him, and she would give him food, and sit beside him as he lay down, and send him away, since it must be so, before it was light. The miserable man rose up, and held her for a long long time to his heart, and then said, "Dutiful hast thou ever been, and ever wilt be: obey thou thy father in this thing—return to your mother and your brother. Disturb not their happiness this night by my name; but when you think fit, tell your mother that you saw me alive, and that I am not more miserable than all must be who forsake God, and forget the nature of their own immortal souls." Margaret, stunned and awed by the solemnity of his voice, did not even kiss her father again, but did as he bade her, in obedience to a power that overruled her will, and left him sitting by himself in that solitary place.

CHAPTER XIII.

On her return, Margaret found them all greatly alarmed by her unaccountable absence; and it was not in her power to conceal the secret within her own heart for a single night. Indeed, her agitated manner showed that something unusual had happened to her; and therefore, after a few minutes' ineffectual efforts to recover herself, she summoned up courage to tell the whole truth. The joy that had been so loud by that little cheerful fireside was suddenly hushed down into deep and solemn thought—the young sailor's laugh was silent in a moment, and his arm tenderly supported his mother, as, with a deep sigh, she laid her head upon his bosom. It was a wild strange thing to know that her husband was then, perhaps, within a few hundred yards of them all, yet hidden from them, in the darkness of night, in some obscure and unsearchable place—perhaps cold, hungry, and sleepless, and without shelter. Here they had a warm fire, a frugal meal, and comfortable beds—while he was lying, perhaps, in his penitence, upon the cold ground, in self-inflicted punishment and debasement. "Oh!" thought Alice, "if his soul would but tell him to come to me this night, he would know how perfect can be a wife's forgiveness—how heavenly to her own soul a wife's love!" But the night passed on, and her husband came not to her—although, no doubt, the unfortunate man was not far off in

his penance; and perhaps, at the dead of midnight, ventured up the lane, when all the inhabitants were asleep, and looked upon the little tenement that contained a treasure he had flung away, and which he could only hope to have restored to him in heaven.

After a few days passed in constant consideration on her husband's affecting behaviour, Alice began to take comfort, and to allow herself to be persuaded that she ought now to be much more happy. That Walter had come a long journey from some unknown place, just to be assured that she and his children were well, and to see them with his own eyes, was a thought that sank with deep joy into the dejected heart of one who had been so cruelly forsaken. Not a word, even of rumour, had she heard about him for many many months, and she had believed that she was utterly forgotten by him, or an object of dislike and aversion. But now she knew that she and her children were still dearer to him than anything else in this world; and although, in her humble and humbled heart, she attributed his visit more to his love for them than for herself, yet she did not such injustice either to her own nature or to his, as to think that she had no share in his disturbed affection. Something pure and unselfish, yet not unallied to pride, touched her heart as she felt herself restored, in thought, to her husband's bosom. Her own had ever been warm and faithful; and there had been a time when it sufficed to bless Walter Lyndsay as he laid down his head upon its innocent beauty. Time and sorrow had changed both her heart, and the bosom where it beat; but wasted as her frame now was, and seeming to bear the burthen of more years than had yet been hers, she felt that were God to send back her husband, she would meet him in all the love of their younger and brighter days, and that her lips would kiss away for ever, and without reproach, the stains that an erring life had left on that manly breast. There were now times in which she almost persuaded herself that she was no longer a widow.

Everything that Margaret told her of that interview, seemed to prove a fixed determination in her husband's mind to return to his family, on the death of her for whose sake he had forsaken it; and when Alice tried to imagine all the miseries he must have gone through—all the remorse—and then his affection for herself and children that had survived them all, she not only forgave him his sins, but wept for him tears of an unmingled tenderness and pity, the same as if he had sustained some great misfortune in his own house, and had never deserted her bed. She even tried to frame excuses for him, in his own imprudence, in the ruinous conversation of unprincipled men, and in other artifices to her unknown, but that might have assailed him by degrees, till at last he was entangled in a net from which he could not break. Even her own deficiencies and defects were brought meekly up by this Christian to soften her husband's sin; and she tried to believe that if she had been more cheerful, more lively, more inclined to propose occasional relaxation and indulgence in innocent pleasures and recreations to her husband, that his affections might perhaps never have been alienated, and that they might still have been all happy together at Braehead.

Such were the conversations that her mother sometimes had with Margaret; and a happy thing it was, indeed, to that young and loving heart to hear her father spoken of by one she revered as almost perfect in such gentle terms of forgiveness. In the kindling joy of filial affection, all thoughts of the guilt and the sin were consumed; and no image was before her but that of a long-absent father returned at last. When she did think of his guilt, it was with awe and grief; but rather for herself, and all human beings in general, than for her unfortunate father. If he had so sinned—he who was so kind, so good—how could she hope to escape guilt? She remembered all his instructions—all his prayers long ago; how she had often seen him even weep when her mother, or herself, or her sisters, were ill—how he had often sent away the beggar from his door blessing him and his fireside. Since such a father has indeed erred, what may become of us his children? Therefore Margaret Lyndsay cheered her mother by tenderest expressions respecting him who was away, and in that communion of simple, humble, and forgiving Christian hearts, he was thought of less as a sinner than as a penitent.

Nor did the mother receive less solace and support from her son—her brave and affectionate sailor boy. All this misery had happened since he had gone to sea. Something of it he had known before his return; but the full light had not been let in upon him till the night of his father's visit. He had himself given his mother a sore heart when he became a sailor; and now he had an opportunity, however short the time might be, to assist in healing a far deeper wound. Though little more than sixteen years of age, he had seen and suffered great hardships on board ship on the West India station; and although nothing could tame the ardour of his strong, fearless, happy spirit—yet the roaring of the elements, and the frequent spectacles of ghastliest death, had given a thoughtful cast to the lad's character, and made him very gentle and compassionate. A single year of danger and hardship had made his soul grow largely; and when his mother spoke to him about his father, she was made happier than she had thought she ever could be, by his grave, sensible, and most affectionate participation in all her fears and hopes. She now looked upon her Laurence no more as a wild reckless creature, for whom she would have alternately to weep tears of blame or grief, but as a dutiful son, firm and thoughtful even beyond his years, and likely, if his life was prolonged, to be a blessing to them all, and also, when she looked at him with a mother's eyes—her own darling pride.

It seemed now as if the sunshine came more brightly and more frequently into the lane—people's faces did not look so sallow and cheerless—the noises about the house were not so harsh and grating—and they felt that the darkest nook in the heart of a town could be a pleasant place. Laurence had leave to come ashore very often, his Lieutenant befriending him; and every day his weatherbeaten sunburnt face, that glistened at the same time with the joyful beauty of boyhood, sent new strength into his mother's heart. He whistled

and sang like a very bird all day long whenever he saw they were all disposed to be happy. The veteran alone has a right, and a strong one, to be desponding; but the young sailor, feeling his life afloat and drifting over the sea, rejoices when his feet touch again the steadfast earth, and gathers from every short and uncertain visit to the house of his father or his mother, new thoughts and feelings to feed and live upon, when again the midnight winds shall be piping in the shrouds, and his ship going in darkness along her foaming paths on the great deep.

The free and joyful demeanour of the young sailor pleased all their neighbours in the lane. Something of that enthusiasm with which most minds think of the British navy was found even here; and he never made his appearance without kind and cordial greetings from many a door and window. It was well seen that he was a dutiful son, and the power of that most human and needful of all virtues, filial piety, is never lost, even on the most careless or most callous. It goes, with its appeal, to every human feeling, at once to the gate of the heart, and nothing obstructs its entrance. The satisfaction the neighbours felt in seeing the young sailor, spread itself over all the family; and some of them who had not been accustomed to speak with the Lyndsays, now congratulated them with homely warmth on the boy's return, and prayed that God would save life and limb from battle or shipwreck, for sake of his mother, who was a widow, and worse than a widow. Thus was peace restored to the soul of Alice Lyndsay—and she could now sit by her fireside at night, with her children laughing, talking, working, singing round her, and almost partake in the circling merriment;—while on Sabbath, as they sat beside her in the House of God, her heart was filled with a tranquil gratitude, and had a humble hope, that one great blessing more might yet be granted to their united prayers.

It was in such a tranquil state of resignation, that on the afternoon of a Sabbath-day, about the middle of April, Margaret ventured to propose to her mother that they should all take a walk together as far as Braehead. The sound of that word was a pang to her heart; but she looked upon Margaret's face, and she saw nothing but a cheerful smile. "Why not go, mother? we are all together now, and before very long may be even more together still. Laurence, ask my mother to go—for she can refuse you nothing—and does not care about me, now that you have come home!" The two together soon prevailed. Esther's blind face sparkled with joy—and Marion, whose remembrances, dim and confused as they were, yet came upon her at the sound of the word Braehead, which had for so long been one of the most familiar in her small vocabulary, looked upon them with an expression of fleeting intelligence as they were preparing to set off, and said—"Braehead is the place for birds and butterflies, and the singing honey-bees. Is Robin redbreast dead and buried? We'll soon see;" and then she ran to her tame dove, and taking it up, began to fondle it, and entirely forgot

that any other notion had been in her mind, or that she was to be taken with the rest to Brachead.

It was a pleasant afternoon, and thousands of peaceable parties, mostly family ones, were taking their weekly walk in quiet and contented happiness. Each group was satisfied within itself, and greetings were interchanged, as they passed along, in that kind spirit which had been infused into their minds by the service of the hallowed day. There was no noise, and one character of grateful contentment reigned over all. The large city was hushed within, without, and around. Every irregular and disturbing feeling seemed almost wholly calmed; and the gentle closing of day, without being dull or spiritless, was such as the minds of men would have desired, who were obliged by necessity to forget in their usual occupations more serious and solemn thought, and who therefore enjoyed the stated return of leisure and freedom from a painful thraldom, much more in the sobriety of reflection, than they would have done in eager and unrestrained delight. The young sailor, who had not forgotten his Scottish Sabbaths in foreign countries, but who had kept them with a happy conscience amidst the tumult and recklessness of a ship of war, now walked through places well known and well beloved, with a heart alive to every minute remembrance. He had some pleasant or gay thought to connect with every field, and with many of the knotted trunks of the old wayside trees. At first his recollections, as he gladly expressed them, were mournful to his mother's heart; but when she reflected how happy were all her children, and that her husband would probably return to her, that despondency gradually wore off, and before they came in sight of the plane-trees of Brachead, faintly tinged with the verdure of spring, she felt quite happy, and joined with her children in a joyful exclamation, as soon as they beheld the roof of what had so long been their own house. Its appearance gave no painful shock—there it stood in its well-known vernal beauty; and Margaret's eyes flashed through joyful tears as she turned smiling round to her mother, and said, "Bonny Brachead looks as sweet as ever—it is not true that they have cut down our trees."

The small party did not go straight up to the house, but, by a footpath, went into the wide broomy field behind it, and sat down together on a green knoll. Little or nothing was changed. They knew the very cows that were pasturing about them, and the tall grey horse belonging to John Walker, their old neighbour, was taking his Sabbath rest in the pasture. A few early lambs were running to and fro—the voice of bees was not unheard—and the loud, clear, and mellow song of the blackbirds was ringing through the Braidhill Wood. It was just a Sabbath of other years. One person only was wanting. Had he been with them, their happiness had been complete. But although he was not there, his image was; and there were circumstances known to one and all of them, that gave them reason to hope that, on their next visit, he might be present at the head of them all, and dearer to them for the sake of his mis-

fortunes and his repented sins. So the small party continued sitting in tranquillity—not indeed a party of pleasure, for that is but a shallow word—but one contented with their lot, and humbly anxious to deserve it, with all its sorrows, by resignation to the decrees of Heaven.

Laurence started up, and taking Margaret by the arm, cheerfully said, "Let us visit honest John Walker." His mother, Esther, and Marion followed; and by well-known ways they soon were at the door of their rude but kind-hearted neighbour. All the family were at home; and, after the first friendly meeting, all eyes were riveted on the young sailor. Young and old devoured the words of him who had sailed the seas, and seen far-off countries. The good woman of the house soon got tea ready, and the spirits of all rising in the unexpected pleasure of the visit, an hour or two passed away as cheerfully as ever they had done in former times, when the Lyndsays were themselves inhabitants of Braehead. No heart was suffered to flag, or to give itself up to painful recollections. A homely happiness bound them all down within the limits of that room; and while Laurence told tales of foreign parts, and spoke of his ship, her guns, and her crew, his own mother listened with pride and admiration, and had not a single thought of her own calamities. Margaret sat eyeing her brother with a sparkling countenance; and blind Esther, whose own steps were so limited, followed in a dream the course of the ship in which Laurence had sailed so many thousand leagues, and formed her own incommunicable ideas of the countries he described, and their strange inhabitants. Poor Marion, forgetting, as it seemed, her present life, in the vivid remembrance of other days, recognised pieces of the furniture formerly familiar to her, went up to the large wicker-cage, and spoke to the thrush by his name, and then patted the head of the large good-natured mastiff, whom she knew to be an old acquaintance. "Let us return thanks," said John Walker—and every one was silent as he repeated the prayer and thanksgiving.

"Let me now discharge my debt," said Alice, with a cheerful countenance. "You raised four pounds for us among the neighbours, when it was sorely needed. There it is—and my sailor gave his share—God bless him!—nor was Esther wanting." A calm satisfaction of the conscience was in the widow's heart when Mrs Walker took the money, and said, that a' the neighbours would think there had been a blessing in it—for that the Lyndsays were no longer poor.

But they could not leave Braehead without visiting, if they durst, what had so long been their own dwelling. They understood that decent and good people now inhabited that house. Without any disturbed emotion, they opened the little gate, and heard the sound of the gravel beneath their feet, as they walked together past the front. The windows were as clear and bright as before, and the creeping shrubs which had grown up under their own eyes, and had been tied by their own hands, had not been neglected. All was neat, orderly, and beautiful. A similar spirit of domestic happiness now

seemed to prevail over the dwelling. As soon as it was known who they were, chairs were kindly set for them all, and a young decently-clad couple welcomed them as visitors to the house in which they had so long lived. Their hearts were fortified by pure, resigned, religious contentment, and not a tear was shed. Alice was grave and sedate—but Laurence and Margaret, overjoyed at seeing their mother so happy, smiled at each other, and alluded to former times. They did not repine—they felt no envy towards the present worthy inhabitants. They had had their own long days and years at Braehead—and now Margaret was satisfied to live in that dark and gloomy lane, and Laurence to be a wanderer on the seas.

They all felt that God had been gracious to them, and that, as long as they obeyed His laws, happiness would find them out wherever their lot was cast. It was the Sabbath-day—the day of contentment and peace ;—they had been happy for a few hours more at Braehead ; and now that the daylight was nearly gone, and the sun sinking, as they had all often seen him sink behind the distant Highland mountains, they said good-night without any painful sighs—and, walking quietly back to the town through the pleasant dimness of the dewy evening, they entered the door of their own dwelling in the lane—and, after short and fervent prayers, all lay down in peace.

CHAPTER XIV.

Laurence sometimes brought to his mother's house a young messmate, named Henry Needham, who had been his bosom friend from the first month they were together at sea. He was an English boy, the son of a poor curate with a large family, and had left home clandestinely, like Laurence himself, for the life of a sailor. He was nearly two years older than the Scotch boy, and had been of great use to him in all his duties on board ship. In Kingston harbour Laurence had had the yellow fever, and Harry Needham had been his nurse. The lads, therefore, were indeed real friends—brothers ; and no wonder that Harry was at all times welcome in the widow's house. Alice, in a few days, absolutely loved him as her own son. Margaret showed him, by her sweet smiles and gentle voice, how happy she always was to see him who had saved her brother's life ; and blind Esther, charmed by the sound of his southern speech, and by the heartsome laughter that ever accompanied the gay talk of the witty "English laddie," was always more cheerful when he was in the room. Both boys had ceased to indulge in any delusive dreams of a sea life, and had experienced many of its hard and stern realities. But they had chosen it, were now bound to it by honour, pride, spirit, fortitude, and many other feelings that are not easily tamed or extinguished ; and, although the ignorant enthusiasm of young imagin-

ation had now less power in their minds, yet they were proud of their profession, and showed by their bold, free, and unclouded eyes, that they were contented to face danger on that element, and glad, when it could be so, to enjoy on shore the happiness of calm human affections.

Laurence's mother had for a long time been so much a prey to severe affliction, that her heart had often ceased to follow him over the seas, and had almost been brought to a sort of dull and sad conviction that her boy would never return. His sudden and unexpected reappearance completely thawed the frost in her heart—and that heart was now filled with the warm overflowings of maternal love and pride. Laurence was much grown; and while any one might have thought him a handsome boy, to her he seemed much more. Her naturally calm and sedate spirit, rendered more so by no ordinary sufferings, was not proof against such deep delight as now came upon it; her face was now often overspread with smiling happiness; her motions more lively and active, as in former pleasant days; and all the neighbours said that Mrs Lyndsay was quite a new woman since the return of her boy. Laurence, too, looked forward on life in hope and confidence; and told his mother, that, if he was spared, he might not always be serving before the mast; for that his captain, finding he had education, had promised, if possible, to get him, some day or other, made a midshipman. The widow's heart was full of gratitude to Heaven when she listened to her son's cheerful voice, and partook insensibly in some measure of those eager and ardent hopes which buoyed up and gladdened the lad's fearless spirit. The sea sounded less mournfully and terribly in her dreams, and she was even able to smile and half believe, when Laurence laughingly told her that sea was the place for long life, and that people almost all died on their lazy beds on shore. "I will not be so low-spirited about you again, when you are away, Laurence," said his mother; but she knew not her own heart at the time she spoke, for her fears were to be in proportion to her love, and that was now, indeed, exceeding great.

"To-morrow is May-day," said the young sailor to his mother, "and I am set upon a ploy. I must have my face washed in May-dew on the top of Arthur's Seat. It will keep it from being sunburnt. Bonny Mary Mitchell shall be my sweetheart for the time, and Margaret there may be Harry Needham's. Esther will take hold of my other arm, and we will all come back, perfect beauties, in time to breakfast. We must start by sunrise, or the diamonds and pearls will all be gathered up from the grass by the hands of idle thieves like ourselves, who go to cheat the fairies." Harry joined his eloquence to that of his friend, and Alice, happy to see them all happy, agreed to the proposal.

Before four o'clock on May morning, the party left the dark narrow lane, wherein all seasons of the year were so much alike, and walked arm-in-arm together beneath the soft still dawning that was colouring the heavens above with the beauty of its rosy light. The city was yet hushed in sleep, and the huge masses of buildings smokeless,

glimmering, and silent. Here and there the footfall of an early riser was heard, perhaps going to awaken or collect a party for the same pleasant pastime. The turrets of Holyrood were sounding in the twilight with the coo of pigeons as the little party passed by the old palace; and it seemed to be getting visibly lighter every moment, till they reached the stone seat at St Anthony's Well.

Their hearts were happy, and as they sat talking and laughing, all the scene before, around, and above them, became apparent,

"Under the opening eyelids of the morn."

The heaven sent its still bright joy into their young and open souls—the freshness of the dewy greensward glittered on all sides—the pure radiance of the little undisturbed fountain, by which they sat, in its rocky cell, was pleasant to them so early afoot—the small birds began to twitter among the masses of the ruined chapel—and "There she lies!" exclaimed Laurence, gazing on the now apparent Firth, and pointing to their own frigate—"There she lies, Harry—the lazy lubbers will be about mounting the morning watch!" Harry pointed out to Margaret, at his side, his Majesty's frigate the Tribune; and said, pressing her arm closer to his heart, "After this, I shall never drink my grog, without saying or thinking, 'Health to sweet Margaret Lyndsay.'"

It was now perfect daylight, and the joyous party ascended the hill. "What right, by the by," said Harry Needham, "have you folks in Scotland to call your mountains by the name of our English kings? King Arthur, indeed! He never sat up yonder in his days. And then you have your round table, too, at John o'Groat's House. If my father was here—he is a devil of an antiquarian—he would tell you all about it, and send that old Scotch fir round table spinning into the North Sea."—"When we come to any o' the fairy rings," whispered Blind Esther, "I wish you would stop and tell me, for I would just like to sit down in the middle o' ane, and try a charm."—"No stopping, ladies and gentlemen," said Laurence, "till we get to the topmost top of the Seat, and then I will take breath, and a kiss and a half from Mary, which she promised me last Wednesday. I think I see Jack Swinton looking at us with his glass from the frigate. But we have the best of the joke." Youth and joy carried them swiftly up the hill, and they welcomed in May-day, as it was right they should, in spite of all the telescopes of the Tribune.

"Could you show us such a sight as this in England, Harry?—If King Arthur never sat here, as you and your dad say, so much the greater pity for him. There's a Castle for you, that you Englishers never could take since it stood on that rock—and there is a City worth looking at—nane o' your low-built straggling streets, but houses o' fourteen stories, and filled from keel to deck with perhaps a jolly crew of five hundred men, women, children, and auld wives!—There's a corn country for you—and yonder's the Highlands, that will send down, in harvest-time, a shower of shearers. England!—Will you ever compare England again, Harry, with such a country as Scotland? Look at it, I tell you. Let Margaret wash her ain

face in the dew, and look down, you lubber, on the Lothians." Harry was in too happy a humour to deny Scotland's pre-eminence over all the lands of the earth; and as Margaret Lyndsay wiped the May-dew from her smiling face, and with an innocent blush half-hid it from him below her bonnet, he would have willingly allowed Scotland, even if it had been nothing but a sterile waste of sand, stones, and rocks, to be the Garden of Eden, and the very heart of Paradise.

Hundreds of other parties were now sprinkled over all sides of Arthur's Seat. The townsfolk met on the summit with people from the country, who had ascended from the direction of Duddingstone, and other villages to the south. One spirit of hilarity prevailed over them all; and the gay, glad, green hill sent up the voice of its rejoicing into the air, which was now brightened by the strong sun, and animated with the multitudinous currents of insect life, that seemed to come flowing interminably on from the unknown places of their generation, and passing away with their burnished or sober-suited wings into the appointed silence of their transient and happy existence. The city bells chimed "six"—and the fair beaming May morn was now in all her beauty, glory, and magnificence, over earth, sea, and heaven.

This little party, quite wild with joy, came dancing down the hill—but one of them always was with the blind girl. She seemed to enjoy the May-day morn as much as any of them—and almost every minute had been adding to her bunch of primroses, which the others had gathered. The loss of eyes was no loss to her—her happiness was complete. And when again they rested, after their descent, on the stone seat by St Anthony's Well, unasked she sang them one of her favourite songs. In the midst of such happiness as theirs, it is not to be wondered at that she chose a plaintive air; and never had her voice sounded so silver-sweet as among the echoes of that silent place. Two or three other small parties, arrested, as they were passing by, listened with delight to the unexpected music —"Puir thing, I'm thinking she's blind."—"It's that makes her sing sae sweet."—"God send you a long life and a happy ane, my bonny bairn,"—and with these and similar words the strangers passed on their own way.

Then there was talk of foreign countries—of islands overshadowing the sea with their beautiful trees—of the canoes of savage men—of battles—shipwrecks—calms—storms—midnight watches on the mast-top—merry-meetings below decks—the dull imprisonment at sea—and the exulting liberation on shore. The girls drank in every word with greedy ears; and Esther forgot the fairies and their rings in thoughts dim and delightful, stretching away, in her dark imagination, over the uttermost parts of the earth.

Alice and poor Marion had not been up above half-an-hour, the room had just been made clean and tidy, and the breakfast-table covered with a white napkin, when the laughing May-dew gatherers were heard in the lane. Laurence brought in Mary Mitchell and Esther; and happy Harry Needham, a few paces behind, attended

Margaret, beautiful from the breath of the clear mountain-air, innocent and happy, and forgetful of every thing but the present hour, which to her bounded this life, and left it undarkened and undisturbed by memory of the past and fear of the future.

CHAPTER XV.

That May-day morning had sent mirth and joy through many a narrow lane and gloomy court among the multitude of huddled houses from the Castlehill to Holyrood. Many dwell in those dark and hidden places, the years of whose childhood have been passed on the clover lea or the heathery moor. They have not lost their liking to the pleasant cottages and farms of the country, nor altogether forgotten the sound of the stream along whose banks they walked to the parish school, and in play-hours bathed in its pools and linns. A thicker atmosphere is now over them than that which they breathed of old; and they are in all respects townsfolk, and contented with their lot, in the midst of noise and obscurity. But if there be an occasional festival in which they may recur to the images of their former life, there are many who will not choose to forget or neglect it. The artisan or mechanic leaves his dim workshop for an hour or a day, and feels that he has yet a heart not insensible to those pleasures which have long ceased to make a part of his life's enjoyment. Gathering May-dew on a green hillside, and dancing in a fairy ring at sunrise, are pastimes little suited to poor hard-working people, cribbed and confined in noisome alleys, and shut out almost the whole year through from the very light of heaven. But the love of nature lies more or less in every human heart;—in many hearts such as these it is strong and indestructible; and on May-day morning, Arthur's Seat and the other high grounds (thirty years ago at least) used to be covered with groups of persons in the very lowest situations of life, whose hearts and whose imaginations, town bred as they were, rejoiced once more in the fresh dews and pure airs of the country, remembering, as they did, the green pastoral hills of Tweeddale, or the misty glens of Badenoch and Lochaber.

Mrs Lyndsay's scholars had May-day to themselves; and some of them brought to school next morning flowers scarcely yet faded, and small twigs of the green hawthorn. That play-day had given spirits both to teachers and scholars. There was even more than the usual cheerful hum in the room, and Margaret had never before felt her task to be so pleasant. Her heart was happier than it knew; and were her father to come home (which she felt assured he would do soon), then that room in the lane, which had at first seemed so wretched a place only a few months ago, would be just as pleasant and happy as the one at Brachead.

In this cheerful state of mind Margaret had one afternoon gone to take a walk with Mary Mitchell. Mary was the first girl about her own age whom Margaret had formed acquaintance with, since she had ceased to be a child; and, rather from that circumstance than any similarity of disposition, she felt for her a very sincere friendship. She was a good-humoured, good-looking girl; and Margaret, who had scarcely any other companions of her own years, was always happy in her company. They met, accidentally, with Harry Needham, and he proposed going to the Theatre. At this proposal Mary's face kindled; but Margaret knew that her mother never went there, and she also knew that her grandmother had always spoken of the playhouse as a den of wickedness. She therefore at once refused to go. But the gay young sailor laughed at all her scruples, and offered, if she would go, to take all the blame upon himself, and to convince her mother of the harmlessness of the amusement. Margaret felt her imagination roused by the words "Tragedy of Douglas"—she said within herself, that it was hard not to see for once in her life what so many had seen; and having read the play, which has been often printed as a cheap pamphlet, she knew there was nothing bad in it—so, being by nature somewhat mutable in her lighter resolutions, she was prevailed upon to enter the door.

The house was a full one; and, before the curtain drew up, Margaret thought herself in a splendid dream. The lights—the music—the ladies in the boxes—the whole spirit of the place—so totally at variance with the small quiet room she had just left—all held her in a delighted delusion; and she scarcely thought herself in this world. At last the stage was revealed—and that solemn Soliloquy was spoken by one whose every word sounded straight to the heart—Mrs Siddons. As the tragedy went on, Margaret gave her tears and sobs freely—and would not, even for her mother's anger, have torn herself away from Lady Randolph and her late-found son. At last the curtain fell upon the dead Norval and his mother wailing over "my beautiful—my brave;" and Margaret, whose hand had long been held, without her being sensible of it, by the young sailor, started up, with her face drenched in tears, and many sobs struggling in her bosom, and, as if awakened out of a trance, insisted on going home.

Harry Needham parted from them near the lane, at Margaret's request; and now she trembled as she opened the door, for she knew that she had done what would give her mother much concern and displeasure. Mary Mitchell was with her; and, immediately on sitting down, said that Margaret had been drinking tea with her, in the absence of her parents, who had gone to visit a neighbour. Margaret, thus relieved from the painful necessity of confessing her fault to her mother, seemed, by her silence, not to contradict this falsehood—and in a short time her confusion went away.

Then Margaret Lyndsay felt that she had been guilty of joining in a lie to her mother, to conceal conduct with she knew would be displeasing and distressing to her, and therefore forbidden. She

was ashamed to look up, and wished that there was no light in the room. But how could she confess her fault now, and make poor Mary Mitchell a liar? That good-humoured girl was not afraid about herself; for her parents did not care about such things, but had broken the truth to save a friend. Partly, therefore, from shame, partly fear, and partly from feeling to her companion, Margaret said nothing, and they all went to bed. The simple creature hardly dared to say her prayers. Her sin had not been very great; but, in the night-time, it seemed to her to be most wicked, and she often thought of rising up, and going to her mother's beside to confess it all. But the innocent creature fell asleep, and in the morning light she felt relief, and began to consider her offence as less heinous. She determined, however, to confess her fault to her mother before another evening's prayer.

The scholars came in, and Alice was just going to ask some question in the Catechism, when one of the girls said—"Oh! I wish you had taken me to the playhouse with you last night. My brother said he saw you there with Harry Needham, the English sailor." Margaret wished herself dead. Had she been convicted of a deadly sin, more sinking and suffocating sickness could not have oppressed her heart. Alice looked at her with astonishment and grief; but other feelings touched her, when her poor daughter rose up, sobbing, pale, and weeping, and with difficulty walked into the other room. "It is quite true, mother. I did what I well knew was forbidden, and I told a lie to conceal it. I knew not that I had been so wicked. Oh mother, that yesterday afternoon was to live over again! then might I be happy."

Mrs Lyndsay was soon told the real extent of her daughter's error; and when she looked at her covering her face with her hands, as if in the shame of sin, her heart was deeply affected with the sight of so much simplicity and innocence. Few amusements, indeed, had her Margaret—and if she had slightly disobeyed, it was in the joy of her heart, and under a temptation that had kindled affections natural and harmless. "Oh! may she remain always as simple, as pure, and as fearful of offence, as she now is," prayed her happy mother. She saw how the poor girl had been led to allow a falsehood, and had then not enough of courage, and too much kindness to confess it, to the discredit of one who had wished to shield her; and therefore all day her manner towards Margaret was as tender and affectionate as she could make it, and never before had she uttered her name perhaps with such extreme tenderness, as she did that night in her prayers.

CHAPTER XVI.

Margaret Lyndsay's naturally buoyant and gay disposition now coloured all life to her eyes with the brightness of hope. She had no doubt that her father would return during the summer—that her mother would soon be as happy as ever—and that her brother would go and come back from sea safe and unhurt among a thousand dangers. Her mother sometimes could not but be sad to see her so happy; and perhaps a suspicion—not painful but uneasy—was in her maternal heart, that Margaret's excessive gladness was in a great measure owing, unknown to herself, to young Harry Needham. The two boys served together, otherwise she would have prayed, much as she was pleased with his frankness, simplicity, and warmth of heart, that the ship would sail and carry the young Englishman for ever away from her house. She feared that if he stayed much longer Margaret would not easily forget him, and that a secret sadness might long remain in that pure and innocent heart, now overflowing with happiness. Laurence never by any accident came to see them but Harry Needham was along with him; and although Harry sometimes pretended that he had come up to see Mary Mitchell, she discerned clearly that he cared for nothing but the sweet smiles of her own Margaret.

The young sailor was indeed very much in love. Never before had he seen such a girl as Margaret Lyndsay. Her sense, her simplicity, her gaiety, all made to him more delightful by her Scottish voice, dialect, and manner, quite won his whole heart. As to marrying, that thought never once entered the mind of a boy of eighteen, who had run away from his parents, neither did so much as the shadow of one wicked thought pass across the heart of that brave young sailor. He had sisters of his own about Margaret's age, and he loved her as tenderly as he loved them, but with a passionate and engrossing restlessness, when she was out of his sight, all unlike calm fraternal affection. He never thought of the future, or, if he did, it was of his ship coming again to Leith, or of himself and Laurence walking down to Edinburgh from some English seaport on leave of absence. In the present he lived—and, whenever he could leave the vessel, that moment he turned his back upon the shore, and walked with a quick undeviating step to that lane where he was always sure to get a glimpse, at least—a smile—a word—a touch of the hand from Margaret Lyndsay.

The time was now drawing near for the frigate to sail, and Harry said that every morning he expected to see her "hoist the Blue Peter;" for it was rumoured that the French Republican fleet were going to put to sea, and that Lord Howe was to be reinforced. A great battle, he said, was expected. At these words Margaret laid down her work, and grew deadly pale. "Be not afraid for your brother, my dear lassie, I'll insure his life for one single kiss;" and, for the last time, the young sailor kissed her lips. Margaret looked round to see if her mother was in the room; but as she was not, she

took up her work—said nothing—and in a few minutes laughed and talked as before. This was on a Saturday evening, and he made her promise to go with him next morning to church. "I will meet you at the head of Leith Walk, and we will go to the English Chapel, as they call it, at Leith. You never were in one, I dare say, and I wish you to see our religion."

Margaret said that she was afraid she might not be allowed to go; but he told her mother that Laurence was to be of the party, and that they would all three return together after service. Margaret thought she saw something in the expression of Harry's face that looked as if he were deceiving her mother about Laurence; and she almost wished that it might be so—a slight silent deceit in a young heart yielding to the first delight of an unconscious and innocent passion—but a deceit, small as it was, that was soon to be wept over in rueful tears.

On Sunday morning Margaret dressed herself with all her care; and her mother could not help sighing as she saw the happy creature standing so much longer than usual before her little mirror, across the gilt top of which hung a bright crimson feather of some foreign bird, a present from Harry Needham. At last she was ready to go; and as she had to walk to Leith before church-time, it was necessary to leave home without her mother and sisters, who were going to a nearer place of worship. Margaret was glad of this; for she had been afraid that her mother might go with her to the head of Leith Walk to see Laurence, when no Laurence might be there; so she took up her little red Bible, and, knowing that she was going to a good place, she went away with a happy but a beating heart. Some of the church-bells were beginning to ring, and she feared she might be too late; yet she well knew Harry would wait for her—so she walked at her usual pace through the yet unbroken silence of the Sabbath streets, on which few people had begun to appear.

Her heart was indeed glad within her when she saw the young sailor at the spot. His brown sunburnt face was all one smile of exulting joy; and his bold clear eyes burned through the black hair that clustered over his forehead. There was not a handsomer, finer-looking boy in the British navy. Although serving before the mast, as many a noble lad has done, he was the son of a poor gentleman; and as he came up to Margaret Lyndsay, in his smartest suit, with his white straw-hat, his clean shirt-neck tied with a black ribbon, and a small yellow cane in his hand, a brighter boy and a fairer girl never met in affection in the calm sunshine of a Scottish Sabbath-day.

"Why have not you brought Laurence with you?" Harry made her put her arm within his, and then told her that it was not her brother's day on shore. Now all the calm air was filled with the sound of bells, and Leith Walk covered with well-dressed families. The nursery-gardens on each side were almost in their greatest beauty—so soft and delicate the verdure of the young imbedded trees, and so bright the glow of intermingled early flowers. "Let us go to Leith by a way I have discovered," said the joyful sailor; and he drew Mar-

garet gently away from the public walk, into a retired path winding with many little white gates through these luxuriantly cultivated enclosures. The insects were dancing in the air—birds singing all about them—the sky was without a cloud—and a dazzling line of light was all that was now seen for the sea. The youthful pair loitered in their happiness—they never marked that the bells had ceased ringing; and when at last they hurried to reach the chapel, the door was closed, and they heard the service chanting. Margaret durst not knock at the door, or go in so long after worship was begun; and she secretly upbraided herself for her forgetfulness of a well-known and holy hour. She felt unlike herself walking on the street during the time of church, and beseeched Harry to go with her out of the sight of the windows, that all seemed watching her in her neglect of Divine worship. So they bent their steps towards the shore.

Harry Needham had not perhaps had any preconceived intention to keep Margaret from church; but he was very well pleased, that, instead of being with her in a pew there, in a crowd, he was now walking alone with her on the brink of his own element. The tide was coming fast in, hurrying on its little bright ridges of variegated foam, by short successive encroachments over the level shore, and impatient, as it were, to reach the highest line of intermingled sea-weed, silvery sand, and deep-stained or glittering shells. The friends, or lovers—and their short dream was both friendship and love—retreated playfully from every little watery wall that fell in pieces at their feet; and Margaret turned up her sweet face in the sunlight to watch the slow dream-like motion of the seamews, who seemed sometimes to be yielding to the breath of the shifting air, and sometimes obeying only some wavering impulse of joy within their own white-plumaged breasts. Or she walked softly behind them, as they alighted on the sand, that she might come near enough to observe that beautifully wild expression that is in the eyes of all winged creatures whose home is on the sea.

Alas! home—church—everything on earth was forgotten; for her soul was filled exclusively with its present joy. She had never before, in all her life, been down at the sea-shore—and she never again was within hearing of its bright, sunny, hollow-sounding, and melancholy waves.

"See," said Harry with a laugh, "the kirks have sealed, as you say here in Scotland—the pier-head is like a wood of bonnets. Let us go there, and I think I can show them the bonniest face among them a'." The fresh sea-breeze had tinged Margaret's pale face with crimson, and her heart now sent up a sudden blush to deepen and brighten that beauty. They mingled with the cheerful, but calm and decent crowd, and stood together at the end of the pier, looking towards the ship. "That is our frigate, Margaret, the Tribune;—she sits like a bird on the water, and sails well, both in calm and storm." The poor girl looked at the ship with her flags flying, till her eyes filled with tears. "If we had a glass, like one my father once had, we might perhaps see Laurence;"—and for the moment she used the word "father," without remembering what and where

he was in his misery. "There is one of our jigger-rigged boats coming right before the wind.—Why, Margaret, this is the last opportunity you may have of seeing your brother. We may sail to-morrow; nay to-night." A sudden wish to go on board the ship seized Margaret's heart. Harry saw the struggle—and wiling her down a flight of steps, in a moment lifted her into the boat, which, with the waves rushing in foam within an inch of the gunwale, went dancing out of harbour, and was soon half-way over to the anchored frigate.

The novelty of her situation, and of all the scene around, at first prevented the poor girl from thinking deliberately of the great error she had committed in thus employing her Sabbath hours in a way so very different to what she had been accustomed; but she soon could not help thinking what she was to say to her mother when she went home, and was obliged to confess that she had not been at church at all, and had paid a visit to her brother on board the ship. She knew that she had almost deceived her mother from the beginning; and remembered her former fault in going to the theatre, and then being accessary to a falsehood in order to conceal it. And now the loud laughing merriment that filled the boat, struck her heart as a violation of the Sabbath. She then tried to believe that the desire alone to see her brother had brought her there; but Harry Needham's arm was round her side, and she felt with a pang that she had acted contrary to all the practice and principles of her former life. It was very sinful in her thus to disobey her own conscience and her mother's will, and the tears came into her eyes. The young sailor thought she was afraid, and only pressed her closer to him, with a few soothing words. At that moment, a sea-mew came winnowing its way towards the boat, and one of the sailors, rising up with a musket, took aim at it as it flew over their heads. Margaret suddenly started up, crying, "Do not kill the pretty bird!" and stumbling, fell forward upon the man, who also lost his balance. A flaw of wind struck the mainsail—the helmsman was heedless—the sheet fast—and the boat instantly filling, went down in a moment, head foremost, in twenty fathom water.

The accident was seen both from the shore and the ship; and a crowd of boats put off to their relief. But death was beforehand with them all; and when the frigate's boat came to the place, nothing was seen upon the waves. Two of the men, it was supposed, had gone to the bottom entangled with ropes or beneath the sail—in a few moments the grey head of the old steersman was apparent, and he was lifted up with an oar—drowned. A woman's clothes were next descried; and Margaret was taken up with something heavy weighing down the body. It was Harry Needham who had sunk in trying to save her; and in one of his hands was grasped a tress of her hair that had given way in the desperate struggle. There seemed to be faint symptoms of life in both; but they were utterly insensible. The crew, among which was Laurence Lindsay, pulled swiftly back to the ship; and the bodies were first of all laid down together side by side in the captain's cabin.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARGARET's mother had gone with her other two daughters to the Greyfriars Church, and after service had taken a walk with them round the outskirts of that part of the town where she thought it likely they might meet with the little party coming up from Leith. No one who saw them walking quietly along, could have supposed that she was a deserted wife—one girl blind—and the other an object of the deepest human compassion. For the stillness of the hallowed day had breathed into the mother's breast a perfect resignation; her face wore a calm smile in the sunshine; and she was respectably dressed in some of those garments which she had bought in the undisturbed days of her humble prosperity. The blind girl was neatly attired in a blue gown—the colour she loved best, because it was that of the sweet-smelling violets—and the straw-bonnet of her own workmanship was gaily bedecked with ribbons of a fainter hue. Poor Marion was decently and neatly clad in sober and Quaker-like grey; and always on the Sabbath she seemed less like an afflicted creature, partly from imitation of others, and partly, no doubt, from dim intimations within her darkened spirit of its dependence on something called God.

Not meeting with those they sought, and afraid of being surprised on the street by the sound of the afternoon bells, Alice took her daughters home, and, instead of again going to church, read to them some chapters of the Bible. In these and other innocent occupations, hour after hour wore away, and still no appearance of Margaret. Such a thing had never happened before; and the mother, after a short fit of doubt and displeasure, was suddenly seized with affright and terror. "Can she have deceived me, as she went out with her Bible in her hand; and is she forgetting me and her God, and His Sabbath, in company with that English laddie?" But that unjust suspicion passed by in a moment, and then she thought of sudden sickness—even of sudden death. The city clocks tolled six, and the dull iron sound drove the belief of some fatal calamity deeper and deeper into her quaking heart. "Sit still, children, till I come back," and with tottering knees she walked down the lane into the wide street.

The rumour of the death of the very humblest individual by flood or fire, or any other lamentable accident, sometimes passes through a populous town almost as quickly as that of some great national event, a victorious battle, or fatal overthrow. Open hearts greedily swallow it in broad and in obscure places—it goes into the dwellings of rich and poor—and for a while thousands upon thousands repeat a name which, an hour before, was known only to a few families, and which, in a day or two, will drop away from the column of a newspaper into silence and forgetfulness. Alice saw four or five people standing together, and speaking earnestly, at the entrance of a court, and heard the words—"All drowned, poor creatures, in breaking the Lord's day—a bonny bit young lassie, they say, plea-

suring wi' her sweetheart, and baith called before the God they had forgotten." She stood close to the group, as if she had been one of them; but she was not able to connect together any more of their words. "Gude preserve us!" said a woman with a child in her arms; "wha is this among us wi' siccan a white face of consternation? Arena ye the schoolmistress in the lane down-by yonner?" —"I am; and if a lassie has been drowned, it is my ain daughter Margaret; for she went out this morning, and I ken now that she will be brought hame a corpse, if ever brought hame at a' out of the sea, where Harry Needham has let her be drowned on the Lord's day."

The sound of wheels was heard coming down a steep street that led into that where they were standing; and a coach approached at a foot's pace, surrounded by a considerable crowd, who walked by it, not like a mob, but silently, and with composed faces. It passed by, and Alice, although nearly blind, thought she saw at the window one in a sailor's dress, like her son. "Wha's in the coach?" asked one of the women.—"The schoolmistress's daughter; some says she's dead, and ithers that she's leevin'; but I saw her face, and I'm sure she is dead: for the bonny een were shut, and her cheeks had a blue and drowned look."

There was no want of pity and commiseration when Alice said—"The drowned bairn's mine." Every heart then was, for a time, made equally compassionate by the sight of such deep affliction brought home to them all; and when the door of the house was shut by the sailor boy on Margaret and her mother, both equally insensible to what was passing, the crowd, in a few minutes, went away silent, one by one, and many with tears in their eyes. "He's a fine callant, yon sailor, and ane that wadna flinch in fecht for a' his greeting so bitterly the noo. Saw ye hoo he lifted the poor bit lassie out o' the coteh, as she had been nae heavier than a windlestrae? The folk are saying he wasna wi' her when she was drowned, but came rowing like desperation frae the frigate o' war in the Roads, to save ane that he kentna was his ain sister till he raised her up wi' his oar, dead and drowned, out o' the cruel salt sea."

But Margaret Lyndsay was not drowned, and was now lying in her bed, restored both to life and to her senses. One question only had she asked at her brother, and the answer to it was enough to make her content that the coldness and the pains of death were creeping all over her body. Harry Needham was dead. She now felt no shame to meet her mother's face—no sorrow to depart from them all—no regret that she was to leave the light of day, and to be buried. Even the fear of God's judgment was for a while absent; and her soul cared for nothing here or hereafter, since she had been the cause of sweet Harry's death. Esther sat by her bedside, and felt for her cold hand. Now had come the time when the blind was, in her turn, to administer comfort; and the soft mournful tone of her voice could not well be heard without comfort by her sister's spirit, however sorely and hopelessly distressed. He who was drowned had been known to her only for a few weeks. She

who spake had been beloved from her earliest remembrances. But then, it was not merely that he was lost to her, for she had expected him every day to be sailing away for ever; but the unendurable and soul-killing agony was, that he was dead—all his glee, mirth, happiness, and beauty extinguished for ever and ever, and that, too, by her own sinfulness and guilt.

Her mother had no upbraidings in her eyes, for Margaret had strength enough to tell, in a few words, the simple truth. But even if her mother had supposed that there was wickedness in so carelessly behaving on the Sabbath (and to the heart of a religious mother, so troubled, a slight profanation of that day was a heinous thing), Margaret would as yet have heeded her not. But exhausted and sickened nature sank down into sleep, while they who looked upon her face prayed that it might be free from all terrible dreams; and as soon as her eyelids were heavily shut, and her hearing locked up, her mother, Laurence, and Esther knelt down together, with their faces upon the bed, and joined their low sobbing voices in fervent ejaculations of prayer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

After an illness of a good many weeks' duration, Margaret Lyndsay was again able to rise from her bed at the usual early hour, and to attend to the concerns of the small household. Her life had been in great danger for some days, and she had known it. At first inconsolable grief and unallayed self-accusation had made her pray for death; but life is sweet to the young, and the love of it had been insensibly reawakened in her heart. Her mother and sister had partly succeeded in convincing her, from her own worst confessions, that the death of poor Harry Needham could not be laid at her door; and although a secret self-blame was at her heart, and often suddenly filled her eyes with tears, yet in general her mind was tranquil on that sad account; and conscience, which will not suffer itself to be long wronged by passion, asserted its own claims to peace.

But on reviving from that fever, Margaret found that there was now greater need for her exertions than ever. The school had stood still during her long and doubtful illness; and it did not seem easy to bring together again all her little scholars. There had been a break; and it is often difficult, even in humblest situations, to take up the thread of life. One or two parents had changed their opinion of Margaret since her Sabbath-day adventure, disastrous as it had been; others, who of themselves would have had no such thought, affected to partake in the judgment of the more austere; but to others her innocent calamity only the more endeared her, and they kindly told her that God did not spare the very best in His inscrutable dispensations. Margaret observed both the cold looks

of them who disapproved, or pretended to do so, and the kinder manner of them who pitied her, with the same meek and humble spirit; and she hoped that neither might be lost upon her future conduct. Her sin, great or small, had been sorely punished; but that punishment only turned her soul in upon itself in lowly contrition, and strengthened, not shook, her faith in the unchangeable goodness and mercy of God.

The very day after the fatal event, the frigate had left the Firth, and Laurence had been obliged to give a silent farewell to Margaret's lips as she lay asleep. Expense was necessarily incurred during her sickness, although the benevolent physician, who attended her as regularly and tenderly as if she had been the daughter of a rich man, would take no fee from the poor widow. He saw what kind of a family, under Providence, he was rescuing from affliction; and the name of Gregory was one that, illustrious as it was in the halls of science, had its greatest and truest glory in the obscure dwellings of wretchedness and want. The mother, who had formerly depended so much on Margaret, had now become as active and awakened as in her more cheerful days, and exchanged the drooping serenity of the comforted for the springing hope of the comforter. But above all, this affliction brought up, from the silent regions of its growth, the beautiful strength of the blind girl's character. No eager selfish delights had she ever known of her own; and now all the love and affection of her sinless spirit flowed up like a gushing spring when the green flowery surface has been stirred, towards her elder sister, whose hand had taught her to set down without fear her dark steps, and from whose cheerful talk she had strengthened the silence of her own heart, and gathered many pure joys to delight her when sitting in the stillness of her uncompanioned solitude. She sang her hymns by the bedside; and sometimes, too, her old Scottish ballads; and that music was a medicine that has lulled to sleep or quieted the throbbing pulse, when any other might have been administered in vain.

By the end of July, Margaret Lyndsay was completely recovered. All her beauty had returned; and some of the neighbours said that the "puir lassie was far bonnier than ever." Now and then one of her scholars would make her and her mother some little useful present; no parent suffered her children to be in arrears with their small weekly payments; even poor people bought things of Esther's manufacture for which they had no use, just to put a few shillings in their way; and these not unobserved humanities, which no doubt are always passing among human creatures, even in states of most abject penury, send a strength to the hearts of those who experience them far beyond that of the cold pence of heartless or reluctant charity.

It now seemed, therefore, as if the summer would pass away with such happiness as they were all well satisfied to possess; and even if each succeeding season of the year were to bring its own distress, they were prepared to meet it, with hearts that had all experienced severe and searching sorrows. Laurence had been spared in the

great battle with the French on the first of June, and would be coming to see them, perhaps, during the autumn or winter. And, "O God of mercy!" would the mother often think, and sometimes say, "my Walter may yet return to my bosom, as he promised, and all his sins be forgiven by his Maker, as by me they will be forgotten as they had never been."

They were all sitting together by the fireside one cold raw September night, somewhat low-spirited, and the mother more than usually desponding and disconsolate—for fits of melancholy overpowered her at times in spite of herself and her children, that spread its dim influence over them likewise—when a single hesitating knock came to the door. Margaret opened it, and a person putting a letter into her hand, went away into the darkness, without saying a word. She brought the letter to the fire, and stooping down to read the direction by that light, she saw that the feeble and faint scrawl was in the handwriting of her father. It was not for her, but for her mother; and although she would fain have known its contents before she gave it into her mother's hand in her present doleful mood, yet that was impossible; so, in reaching it over, she just said, "Oh, me! oh, me!—it is surely my father's writing. It may be to tell us that he is coming home at last."

Mrs Lyndsay opened the letter, and looked at it; but she saw only the first words, "My dear Alice," and the few irregular lines that stopped in the middle of the first page.

"I cannot see to read it, Margaret, and my heart is sick—but read it thou—and be the contents dismal, as I know they are, even unto the fear of death, leave not out one single word, however small. Let us all together hear the worst." Margaret first read the letter into herself; and, accustomed as she had been for some months to grief, she was then able, and just able, to do as she was bid.

"My dear Alice—

"I am on my deathbed. For sake of the love of our youth, and of Him who died that sinners like me might not utterly perish, come, if you can, to the Laigh Wynd, opposite the Barracks, Glasgow. You will find me, by asking for Jacob Russel, at the shop of Mrs Alison, a widow. Give the love of their dying father to our children.

"Walter Lyndsay."

Till this hour, there had always been hope in the house. Not very often did Alice speak of their father to Margaret and Esther; for in such a case, thoughtful, and affectionate, and forgiving silence was best for them all. But never had the deserted wife lain down one night on her bed—never had she risen from it one morning,—without remembering him in her prayers; and believing devoutly that the bonds of sin, though strong, often snap suddenly asunder, and that Walter could love no one in this world as he had once loved her, she had convinced her soul, in her desertion, that her husband would most certainly return, and that they might yet be buried side by side, or in one grave. That trust was now known to be a delusion; for

it was too plain that he would not have so written, had he not felt that his hour was nearly come.

Neither Margaret nor Esther could think otherwise than that their father was dying. Margaret read over many a hundred times the miserable paper, now completely soaked through with tears, and looked at the shape of every letter, syllable, and word, to see if she could extract comfort from one firmer line here and there; but comfort there was none to be found, for palsied, and almost torpid must the hand have been, once so strong and dexterous, that had contrived, by many renewals, to finish the faint and blotted scrawl, that solemnly yet humbly implored love to come to the bed of sin, remorse, and death.

An evil spirit seemed to have put in the letter at the door, to turn their hearts against the God of judgment, and then to have disappeared in the mists and darkness of night; and, sure enough, despair took possession of them; and during the night, no one sought to stop another's groans. Poor Marion alone slept.

CHAPTER XIX.

Long before daylight Alice and Margaret left their house—not fearing to trust the two helpless creatures alone and asleep for a few hours, till a good neighbour, who had promised to take charge of them, would go to them in the morning; and they walked, almost without speaking, to Brachead. They awakened, as quietly as they could, the same friendly man who had formerly taken their furniture in his cart to their lodging in the lane; and Alice told him, in a few words, that her husband was at the point of death, and had written for her to come instantly to Glasgow. "If you can take us there in your cart, John, we will pay you day's wages before many weeks go by—if not, we must just try to walk, although neither of us are very strong, and it is, they say, a lang dreigh road. But, you may be sure, my heart langs sair sair to be wi' my husband, gin it be possible, this very night." John Walker was a poor labouring man—a carter—who earned a subsistence to a large family by hard work from morning to night; it was impossible to have fewer fine feelings than he had—and his manners, often coarse, were perhaps sometimes even brutal. But he had a heart, and had always shown to the Lyndsays a respectful kindness, scarcely to be expected from one of his disposition and habits. He yoked his horse to the cart without delay—put into it a bundle of hay and a bag of oats—covered Mrs Lyndsay with a thick duffle cloak of his wife's, and Margaret with his own greatcoat—and drove off on their way to Glasgow, before the light of the frosty stars had yet become faint on the approach of the morning.

John Walker scarcely spoke ten words the first ten miles, except

to his horse—a tall, raw-boned grey—that stepped freely out at the rate of better than four miles an hour, without his usual weight of a ton and a half of freestone from the quarry. About half an hour after perfect daylight, John turned about to Alice and Margaret, who were sitting among the straw in the cart, and said, "Weel, weel, God bless you, Mrs Lyndsay—how do you feel yourself noo?" They both answered him at once that they were well, and could not be sufficiently thankful to him for his friendly behaviour. "Your gudeman mayna be so ill as he thinks—there's aften a lang way and many years atween sair heartsickness and the point o' death. I'll wauger half-a-croon that he's no at the point o' death, and wunna be for a whilcock. I hae been saying a prayer for him, puir man, these last twa miles. We a' liked you—the haill family o' you—at Braehead. Ma faith, ye's pay me naething for this job—unless I bring back your gudeman wi' us, alive and weel, to Embro'. Mair unlikely things has happened!" The poor woman listened to every word—and tried and tried to believe there might yet be hope, while her tears were falling down upon the straw. But John's last inconceivable thought of bringing her husband back in their very cart, quite smote to pieces all the gathering delusion—and she knew that Walter was dying, or at that very moment dead.

The cart stopped for an hour each time at two small wayside public-houses; and, while the horse was baiting, the travellers sat by the kitchen fire. The respectable appearance of the mother, and the extreme beauty of the daughter—they were so like, that their relationship was plain to all—at once insured them a kind reception; and at both places, after the mistress of the house had spoken a few words with John Walker, nothing could exceed the eager and heart-felt pity she expressed for them in their affliction. Refreshment was pressed upon them, and given into their hands at the warm fireside with condolence and encouragement. Such outbreakings of the native goodness of the human heart sent a comfort even unto their despair; and Margaret once ventured to smile in her mother's face, as if to say "Let us hope;" but the wife was not able, with all her efforts, to return the smile, and her features were only drawn together in a ghastly and hysterical convulsion.

Before dusk, Alice saw, far off to the left, the high grounds at the head of Clydesdale, and the beautiful green hill of Tintock. Under the shadow of that hill she had been born—there had she passed her young innocent days; and though she had for many years ceased often to remember those places, and then but dimly and for a brief dream, yet now that the real objects themselves were before her eyes, their power drew her into the very bosom of that happy life—and she shuddered at her own image, and that of her loving and beloved Walter, on their marriage-day. Margaret, who saw her eyes fixed long in the same direction, and heard a deep groan, feared that her mother was about to swoon; but she only said, "Yon's the hill o' Tintock, Margaret;" and Margaret, who knew the name well, at once understood what was passing in her mother's heart. In another hour or two they passed "Bothwell banks," now not "blooming fair,"

according to Esther's favourite song, but with their rich golden autumnal groves shrouded in the thickening darkness of evening—then the wayside houses began to thicken—and by-and-by the wide gleam of the great iron-founderies shot fitfully round about the sky. "I'm thinking," says John Walker, "that this maun just be Glasgow;" and as the evening bugle-horn was blown in the barracks, the cart stopped short at the end of its journey before the well-lighted and variously-adorned window of Widow Alison, Grocer and Meal-Monger.

John Walker drew up his cart close to the pavement, and remained with it while they walked into the shop. "Ken you ony thing, Mrs Alison, o' ane Jacob Russel?" said Alice, while Margaret stood close behind her. "Wha is't that speers?" said the well-fed, pursy Widow Alison, who was at that moment whirling down a yard of twine from the roller, to tie a two-pound parcel of brown sugar. But getting no answer, she looked up, and met those two countenances, both deadly pale, looking upon her with fixed eyes. "Gude safe us, women, what d'ye want wi' him?—he's no far aff the dead-thraw—gang round the corner into the wynd, up three stairs to the left, and in at the right-hand door, and ye'll find him, aiblins, and his Miss—for she's nae wife yon."

It was Saturday night, and people were coming into the shop like a bee-hive. A staring attention had been directed to the two poor creatures, but they heeded not, saw not, felt not any insult, however coarse, and Alice meekly asked to be suffered to pass out of the shop. John Walker had stopped his cart, and was at the door. "I see stabling ayont the street at yon lamp-post; you can fin' your ain way to him up the wynd, and I'll no let an hour pass till I see you baith again."

Margaret took her mother's arm, and they went as they had been directed. They soon found the door, and listened; but heard no sound except that of something breathing. "There's life in the room," whispered Margaret to her mother, and then gently tapped. No answer was made, so they opened the door and went in. They saw, by the flickering light of an oil-lamp, bare, damp-stained, yellow walls, and a strong breath of wind came upon their faces from a window, with some broken glass or paper panes. Turning towards the breathing sound, they beheld a low wretched bed, in which there seemed to be a sleeper, covered with a brown rug or carpet. Alice went up to it, and, lifting tenderly a small bit of this miserable coverlet, she saw her husband's face, marked with certain symptoms of approaching dissolution. There could be no mistake—no hope—Walter Lyndsay was a dying man.

There were no chairs in the room—only a wooden form, on which mother and daughter sat down. On the table near the bed, on which the oil-lamp stood, were a glass, seemingly with some ardent spirits—a small bottle, labelled Laudanum—a bit of oatmeal bread, and a few cold potatoes. Not a word was spoken. His wife rose several times, and put her ear to his lips; she kissed them, and sat down again on the form. Margaret took off her cloak, and let it drop

slowly and by degrees above the rug that alone sheltered her dying father from the cold night-air that filled the room almost to freezing.

"O God! this is a dreadful sight, mair than ony mortal can bear," lowly groaned forth the wife; "pray for me, Margaret—pray for me, for my heart is like to burst." Margaret knelt down, awed far beyond sobbing or tears, with her head just touching the edge of the bed, and her clasped and uplifted hands close to her father's knees, that were drawn up by pain as he slept.

The door again opened, and an emaciated woman came in like a ghost into the glimmering room. Seeing two figures, one with her head bowed down, and her face covered with her hands, and the other kneeling, she stopped short in the middle of the floor, and said, with a hollow voice, "What is this—who are you—and whence came ye here?" Margaret looked around, and they knew each other. "You are his daughter—I remember you well; is this his wife who hides her face—your mother and his wife?"—"She is so indeed." The miserable creature went and sat down on a seat in the window, where the wind waved up and down her ragged and rusty hair, and all the while kept her sunken but wild eyes directed towards the bed, and the two figures by its side.

The rug moved, for the dying man had awoke, and he now strove to lift up his head. His face became uncovered, and his eyes were open, although they seemed as yet to see nothing. Alice stood up before him, with her meek well-known face, and it was in a moment visible to his whole soul. "Thou art come in time, Alice, to let me die not unforgiven. Oh! a mother's curse is enough—let not that of a wife's be mine too, deserved although it be, Alice, for in thee there was no sin."—"Your mother unsaid that cruel curse, and her last words were a blessing on her son,—and I am here to bless thee too, Walter:—and oh, if it were possible, to die that you might live!" The awfulness of the scene gave strength both to her mind and her frame, and she said, almost with a smile, "Behold your daughter Margaret, our first-born, kneeling at your bedside." He rose up in his bed, and gazed with a smile upon her face, now turned towards him, till his eyes grew glazed. "Kiss me, both of you." His wife and daughter did as they were bidden—his white cold lips returned their kisses—something gurgled in his throat, and he fell back on his chaff pillow. The sins and the sorrows of Walter Lyndsay were at an end.

CHAPTER XX.

The widow and her daughter would have been ill off indeed during their greatest trial, without the kindness of John Walker. He found in the stabler, to whose house he had taken his cart, an old East-country friend, and told him the melancholy business of his

journey. The general claims of humanity are much strengthened by any particular circumstance attending them, however slight; and this man's interest was forthwith awakened towards the poor women, who had come in distress from his native place. A comfortable bedroom was got ready for them, and to it they were removed, before midnight, from the bedstead on which lay the body of Walter Lyndsay. After everything had been made decent about it, with the assistance of that other emaciated and deathlike woman, whom, at such a season, they treated as it became Christians to treat one who so deeply tasted the bitterness of sin, the door of the fatal room was shut and locked. At the bottom of the stair Alice stopped to speak a word to that unhappy person, and to give her a trifle to buy food, of which she seemed in great want; but she had disappeared, and they could see no more of her that night.

The next day was the Sabbath, and it was passed in their room. Alice could not move from bed that day—but Margaret was up as usual, and watched every little restless motion of her mother. Nothing could be said by one to the other, much as they were mutually beloved, in an affliction like this; and they were both stunned into silence by a blow which had removed from their souls one great dear anxiety, never till then, for one hour, entirely absent during a whole long year. There was a completeness in the widow's desolation that almost allowed her to sleep; and, once or twice, when Margaret drew the curtains and spoke to her, although her eyes were but half-closed, she made no reply.

Another day and two other nights dragged their dark hours along—and their light ones worse than the dark. On Tuesday forenoon, John Walker came into the room in a suit of black, with white muslin weepers on his sleeves, and a crape on his hat, which he held in his hand. He sat down, and in a minute or two said, "One o'clock is the hour when the funeral is to leave the Wynd—it will be but sma'—but our landlord is a decent man, and twa or three o' his maist respectable neebors are to walk by the coffin. There's nae-body but mysel to tak the head—but I'se do it wi' a sair heart, for I baith liked and respeckit your husband; and, although but a coorse man in my way, I hae grat mair than ance since twal o'clock on Saturday nicht." So saying, John looked at his old-dialled silver watch, and went away in silence.

"I wish you would shut the shutters for an hour," said the widow, "and I will lie down." Margaret did so; but she left a small opening, and looked through it down upon the street, which was all in the lively bustle of eager and hurrying trade. She kept her eyes on the dark entrance of the Wynd, and the funeral came out into the crowd of carts and people, unheeded except by two or three boys and girls, who stood gazing, and sometimes laughing, as the small procession moved off from the place where they had gathered to see it, and by a few people here and there, leaning indifferently over the half-doors of their shops. One great waggon, with several horses, almost ran against the pall, and Margaret shuddered as if her father had been lying there alive. It found its way, however, through the tide of

existence, and, slow as it went along, soon passed by out of the reach of Margaret's weeping eyes. She said nothing to her mother of what she had seen, and then closed the window-shutters entirely. In less than an hour John Walker returned. His face wore a look of composure, almost of indifference, for dust had been given to dust; and that look gave a kind of cold comfort to the poor girl's heart, speaking, as it did, of the fruitlessness and the folly of struggling with, or repining at, the finished decree of God.

Towards the afternoon the widow arose, and some very plain and cheap mournings, which she had ordered early on Monday morning, being brought, she and Margaret put them on, and, as soon as daylight was gone, she said that they would go out and breathe a little air; and they bent their steps towards the burial-ground of the old Cathedral. They soon found the sexton's house, near the ruined arch of the gateway, and he went with them to show Walter Lyndsay's grave. He was an old, seemingly careless, taciturn man, and putting his foot on one of the fresh-covered heaps (for there were several not far from each other), he said, "That's it, I'm thinking," put the pence that were given him into his pocket, and hobbled away over the pavement of the flat tombstones.

They sat down, one at the head, and the other at the foot of the grave. The shadow of the great Cathedral was over them, and the gloom of that adjacent hill, with its black pine-grove. Thousands and tens of thousands of graves were visible around them, in the uncertain moonlight—grassy turfs—deep-sunk slabs—headstones—tablets—tombs and monuments; but they saw nothing but that one single heap. The night was a raw early frost, but they felt it not—the clock on the tower of the Cathedral tolled eight, and the dull deep reverberating sounds were heard as if at a distance, and no way regarding them; but something white came before their eyes; they both looked up, and, with a sudden superstitious fear, saw a being like a ghost standing close by the grave.

"I would not have come here," said a hollow voice, which they recognised at once, "if I had known who were before me." Alice said, "Poor unhappy thing, we are all of us sinners; there's no anger now in my heart towards thee, whatever there once may have been; but I wish you would gang awa' and sit down on a stane ower-by yonder, and leave me and my daughter to ourselves." The figure did so, and removed to a tomb within an angle of the Cathedral walls.

After sitting a long, long time, with few words, but many thoughts and feelings, till they were both forced to feel the chillness of the air, and of the grave covered with hoar-frost, Alice and Margaret rose up, and went to the place where the woman was still sitting. "Tell me what you can about my husband—but let it be in few words."—"Four months ago he went to Edinburgh, with my consent, just to get a look of you all, as you well know. I was then thought to be dying, and he resolved to stay by me till I died. It is true what I am now saying, that I would have let him go away altogether, and leave me to my fate; but he would not. He promised to me to

return to you, and be reconciled to you after my death. But he grew suddenly worse than me, and is dead before this miserable sinner." —"Were you aye kind to him, when you saw he was dying?"—"Yes, I was kind to him. He was your husband, not mine; but the guilty can be kind to one another; and I did all I could for him on his deathbed; but oh! I have been long weak, weak indeed!—Look at these bones, and say that you are satisfied with my sufferings." The poor creature was thinly and miserably clad, and her emaciated body had little left for the decay of the grave.

Every faintest remain of anger or aversion to the hollow-voiced wretch died away in the widow's bosom. She knew not under what temptations, or in what ignorance the sin had been committed; but she knew well what had been its punishment. "O tell me where you hae sleepit Saturday, Sunday, and Monday night, for you are bluidless and cauld, like ane without food or shelter?"—"I do not remember where I fell down on the Saturday night; on Monday night I was put into a cell, and let out in the morning; and last night I came out to this churchyard, where I heard he was to be buried, and I tried to sleep below a tomb, but it was bitter, bitter cold. But all this cannot kill me, although I am far gone in a consumption—although my lungs are rotten—and although, save the cold potatoes you saw on the table, which I huddled into my lap that night as we left the room, as God is my witness, have I had nothing since that time to eat!"

Margaret had a piece of biscuit in her pocket, which had been given to her by some kind hand on her journey to Glasgow, and she held it out to the famished ghost. "Take it away, take it away, for I wish to starve myself!" and with that she clutched it out of Margaret's hand, and greedily devoured it. At the same time she held her glaring eyes upon the girl, and muttered,—"I dashed you to the ground—I dashed you to the ground, and, like a she-devil, carried off your father to sin and death—yet you pity me, and give me food!"

Margaret and her mother, unable to bear any more of such horror, pointed to two or three shillings—it was all they had to spare—on the tombstone; and forgetting their own griefs before such a spectacle, committed her to God's mercy; and leaving the churchyard as quickly as they could, retired to the house where they lodged.

CHAPTER XXI.

The widow and Margaret, on their return home to Edinburgh, found the two helpless creatures, whom they had left to the care of a neighbour, perfectly well; and Esther, whose thoughtful mind had prepared itself for the worst, heard of her father's death with resignation and composure. No account was given to her of his last

hour, for that would have unnecessarily distressed and haunted her tender heart in its darkness; but she was let understand that he had died without apparent pain, and in such a frame of mind as Christians could have desired. At the recital the tears quietly flowed down her cheeks from her sightless eyes, but there was no loud grief—and her feelings on this occasion partook of the equanimity of her whole character, which had grown up in silent pursuits peculiar to herself, and had seldom been disturbed by what more or less agitates all those who take a part, however humble, in the activity of life. No doubt, the appearance of the blind child sitting, as usual, at her work, with the same sweet smile upon her face, which no sorrow was suffered to scare away, and thinking of her father's former happiness—his going away from them—and his death at last—contributed much to restore to peace both her mother and sister. In her they saw a living lesson of lowly resignation. She had lost a natural protector for ever, as well as they; but she trusted to God in her blindness, and feared not that He would continue to her His inward light. Her fingers plied unceasingly their daily task; and sometimes even she said, that, if it would not disturb them, she would sing them a song—and did so till the sweet sounds calmed their melancholy hearts. The goodness of God was indeed constantly visible to them in the unbroken happiness of this girl; and often, when she herself knew not that any eyes were looking at her, those both of her mother and Margaret drew from her placid countenance unspeakable comfort.

They both felt that to repine at the decrees of Providence was not only fruitless, but sinful. While there was life, there was hope; but now Walter Lyndsay was not, and their souls submitted. Theirs was not a barren religion; but under it their hearts sent up both feelings and thoughts. They had never been hard upon him, when he lived, in their conversations about the unhappy man; they had been prepared to welcome back the sinner with all love to his home; and now, that all such fears, hopes, and affections were buried in the grave, they looked on that life which was henceforth to be their lot, and turned themselves to endure its hardships, and to discharge its duties. Often did they see each other's tears—and tears there were shed by both, which each knew of only for herself, in dark and silent midnights. These nature would not yield up, in the passionate selfishness of brooding sorrow, even to religion; but they interfered not with the more tranquil hours of stated employment. The family were now, as before, regular and industrious; and the hum of the little school revived, like the sound of a hive of bees when the cloud-shadows have again let out the sunshine.

Among the affluent there is sometimes a luxury of grief which is altogether unknown to the poor. There is such a thing as a pampered sorrow which the heart cherishes without being aware of its own selfish enjoyment. Indolent, perhaps, and called to the discharge of no duties, the mourners give themselves up to the indulgence of feelings which are known to be natural, and which they conceive of as amiable, till the remembrance of the loss sustained becomes

evidently fainter and fainter in a mind still surrounded with the comforts and blessings of life; and at last the afflicted return to their usual avocations without having undergone much real or soul-searching and heart-humbling distress. But in the abodes of poverty there is no room, no leisure for such indulgence. On the very day that death smites a dear object, the living are called by necessity, not to lie down and weep, but to rise up and work. The daily meal must be set out by their own hands, although there is in the house one cold mouth to be fed no more: and in the midst of occupations needful for them who survive, must preparations be made for returning, decently, dust to dust. This is real sorrow and suffering; but, although sharp, the soul is framed to sustain it;—and sighing and sobbing, weeping and wailing, groans heaved in wilful impiety, outcries to a cruel Heaven, and the delirious tearing of hair—these are not the shows of grief which Nature exhibits on the earthern floors and beneath the smoky rafters of the houses of the poor. The great and eternal law of death is executed there in an awful silence; and then the survivors go, each his way, upon his own especial duty which is marked out to him, and which he must perform, or perhaps he and the family utterly perish.

Under such circumstances, the discharge of duty is painful indeed, but it is also consoling. If the heart then knoweth its own bitterness, so knoweth it also the sweet infusion of resigned faith. If the father of the house die, the fire must still be lighted—the floor swept—the board spread—the cradle rocked, that holds one, since morning, an orphan. Not otherwise will God feed the poor. But the hand is connected with the heart—and both must exert themselves to procure peace. So was it now with this family. Everything went on as before. They all wore mournings—and, when the scholars left them to themselves, the room was more silent than formerly, and there were, as yet, fewer visits from neighbours. Natural feeling, whose truth and sincerity, in such cases, is a surer guide than the artificial delicacy of custom, kept the families in the lane for a while aloof, except on very short visits. But in a few weeks smiles were seen on the faces both of Alice and Margaret, when friendly greetings were interchanged—questions and replies passed between them all on ordinary topics, just as before—and both took, or seemed to take, the same interest as ever in the goings-on of that narrow and obscure little world.

Indeed, they both felt now that death was mercy. Sin had ruined his soul for ever in this world; and had he been permitted to return to them, it might only have been to witness the gradual dissolution of a frame preyed on by the most incurable of all diseases—remorse. A good husband and father had he been for many, many years; and the widow and the daughter dared humbly to hope that, as he had died in the religion that promises remission of sins, he might not be excluded, guilty as he had been, from the kingdom of Heaven. Had they thought that the prayers of the living would change the doom of the dead, they would, indeed, have worn the floor with their knees; but, in spite of all those natural emotions that have made such a

belief holy in other religions, they knew that the decree had gone forth — and from the pages of the Bible they only ventured to draw a firm trust that he was among the number of sinners that were saved.

This affliction served, too, to remove from poor Margaret's mind the image of Harry Needham. That bright dream had been short indeed—and now it appeared dim in the distance. Sometimes he seemed to be sitting by her side, and his loud merry voice startled her in the stillness of the room, when nothing was said at their work. But the soul loses hold of the objects of its delight, and would in vain cling to unfading love when the beloved is dead and gone. She thought then of Laurence, without the friend who, as he said, swung in the hammock next to his own ;—and all sadder remembrances faded away, as she hoped that her brother would soon return. Her heart was formed for affection. All that she had given to her father now sought her mother's pillow ; and almost all that her drowned lover had inspired, now followed her brother over the distant seas. To deaden the feelings of a heart—so young—so pure—so unselfish —and so pious, was not in the power of anything but death.

In little more than a month after their return, it happened, too, that they received a visit from one whose visits were indeed always a blessing to the poor. Miss Wedderburne was young—not much above twenty ; but although not averse to the innocent amusements and gaieties of youth, and well qualified to grace and adorn all parties, of which these were the occasion, she had thought on the mournful spirit of human life, and how she might best relieve some of its secret miseries. She looked not on the population of her native city as upon beings alien to her ; but often observed, as it passed by, the countenance that bore marks of something deeper than mere common anxieties, and found out the gloomy places to which the eye, dull or red with weeping, retired at night after long hours of toil. She knew that it was in her power to relieve, at least, much temporal distress, and that charity, even in its lowest sense, is the most Christian of virtues. If a family wanted bread or salt, she could often procure it for them ; and she knew that a very little, added to the earnings of industry, would often change penury into comfort. She flew not upon wings to the dwellings of the poor—for she was no angel ; but she walked quietly on feet—for she was a woman, with a heart true to the virtues of her sex. On a bed of down she forgot not those who lay upon straw : the glare of light in her own opulent house blinded not the eye of her mind to the glimmer of the hovel-hearth ; and while she enjoyed, with gratitude, all the comforts which affluence gave her, she remembered that there were such things as cold, hunger, and thirst, in this world. Therefore, this young and lovely gentlewoman was not an utter stranger to the hidden tenements of the poor, huddled together in the obscurity of a large town. Her charities were not ostentations—they were little talked of in drawing-rooms and saloons, although, perhaps, they sometimes received, what seemed there to be their due, a sneer ; but her name was a spell in many miserable places—her face gladdened the sickly

child, even in its cradle—at her voice the din and anger of the wretched often ceased—and her alms, given in the spirit of knowledge, and love, and religion, were truly a boon of charity, and therefore they were blessed.

Nor, in giving sustenance to the bodies of the poor, did she forget their souls. But she had learned to say her prayers by her mother's knees, surrounded with plenty and with peace; the daily bread she asked from God had been laid before her at all times, and never had been wanting; her heart had been taught to feel for others, but as yet had suffered few severe afflictions of its own; that heart she might know in its simplicity, in its happiness, and in its untried virtue, but all this, she was well aware, entitled her not to judge the life of others, to whom God had given a far other doom. Ignorance she pitied rather than condemned; vice, to which her pure nature, fortified by religion and fostered in peace, had always been a stranger, did not separate from her sympathy the erring children of men; of temptations which she had never been called upon to withstand, she acknowledged the power when she saw others giving way; and feeling that the Christian religion was addressed to beings liable to sin, she learned from it to believe that sin abounded, and therefore did not retreat in horror or disgust from iniquities that steeped the bread of the poor in something bitterer than their tears. By the New Testament she tried herself, and felt that she was in too many things wanting; by the same book she tried others too; and when she beheld vice, error, or guilt, then with humility and compassion she knew the awful meaning of those words, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Miss Wedderburne, therefore, sought not to make converts to any peculiar creed, till she had first made converts from sin; and it was not till she had lent her aid to put a fire on the hearth, and a meal upon the table, that she spoke of those sentiments that would make the light of the one cheerful, and the taste of the other sweet. The spirit of religion was, in her opinion, gradually to rise out of the spirit of humanity; and till the father and mother of a family attended to their household cares, and wished that their children should be clothed and fed, she feared that religious advice and conversation might be thrown away. She used no words unintelligible to uninstructed minds; enforced no doctrine or points of faith till she saw hearts willing to receive the spirit of Christianity; and even then, remembered that the New Testament was for all the human race, and that she, in her own ignorance, which she knew to be great, was not to lay down imperatively the laws of Christ. She went not into hovels to harangue, but to leave behind her such charity as might benefit both body and soul; remembering that we have all one common human heart, and that no thought or feeling true to nature, and expressed meekly and earnestly, is likely to be often repeated without finding its way, sooner or later, into almost any bosom. She thus never left the poor and ignorant and vicious, perplexed, confounded, and irritated by words they could not understand, or of which they were unwilling to admit the painful truth; but if at one

visit she did but a little, at another she hoped to do more, and to accomplish at last a slow but a sure reformation.

It may easily be supposed what a blessing at such a time as this was a visit from such a person to the family of the Lyndsays. At her very first entrance, they knew her to be a friend. No airs of condescension, no pride of superior knowledge, no consciousness of alms-giving, were with Miss Wedderburne. She stepped like a lady as she was across the threshold—saluted Alice and Margaret as if they were her equals—and so they most assuredly were—and then sat down without intrusion by their fireside. The old clergyman of the parish had told her their story, so there was no need of any painful conversation. She offered, at any time they chanced to need such assistance, to lend them money; and said with a smile, that, at all events, she would be a good customer to the blind basket-maker. She saw at once that Mrs Lyndsay was a woman of intelligence and amiable character. A few words can tell that to the ear of one like Miss Wedderburne. As to Margaret, even this young lady, who was familiar with the fairest beauties of her native land, could not help being startled at the appearance of such a being in such a dwelling. But the same good sense and fine feeling that made her speak with respect to the mother, prompted her to speak with nothing more than kindness to the daughter. She did not look surprised to see loveliness in a low station; she did not praise it as many might have done; nor, indeed, did she long think of it, when she saw Margaret moving about the room, at her mother's bidding, with such ordered and staid steps, and heard her answers to any questions, so full of sense, and simplicity, and unembarrassed modesty. Never before had she been so deeply interested in the welfare of any two human beings so little known to her; and after sitting an hour, during which time blind Esther, who had been visiting a school-girl, came smiling in unled, and, when told there was a lady in the room, dropped a curtsy towards her as if she had her sight, Miss Wedderburne rose and shook hands with them all, and then benignantly saying that she would be not an unfrequent visitor, took her departure.

That day was the beginning of a new life to them all. They felt their hearts cheered and strengthened by being admitted into communion with one so manifestly good. Margaret's heart yearned towards her with a delightful feeling of admiration, love, gratitude, and reverence. Esther said she would know that voice again, if she was not to hear it for years to come; and the widow thought that, if she were to be called away, here is one who will be a friend to my orphans—God bless her and hers for ever!

CHAPTER XXII.

ANOTHER year came round, and it was ushered in by the dwellers in this lane with the usual homely rejoicings. A livelier stir was among their dark rooms for a day or two, and merriment more eager from the severe and often desponding toil with which it was, for a short term, contrasted. Some families made it a truly happy festival, in which one spirit of disencumbered gladness prevailed, from the old man in his elbow-chair to the very child in the cradle. Too many, perhaps, give way, in their idleness, to vulgar and even vicious indulgences, aggravating the evils of poverty, which they were vainly seeking to assuage; while no doubt others, too dispirited by the pressure of want or sickness to admit jollity within their doors, gave a hasty welcome to the New-year, which to them was the commencement of another twelvemonth's weary labour, and felt that they could afford no more to a foolish festival. Nor were there wanting many who sickened at the very sound of the annual gaieties—those who since that last celebration had lost perhaps their all—the employment by which they had lived, or the parents or children, without whom life was now but a burden. Still the spirit of joy was prevalent over the city. On the whole, there was happiness; and dull or dim faces kept out of the way; so that almost all who were visible at windows, at their doors, or upon the streets, wore the looks of contentment and satisfaction.

The Lyndsays did not shut their door against the glee that was laughing in the lane. "I wish you a happy New-year," was indeed a salutation which could not send its cheerfulness far into the heart of the widow. Scenes were yet present before her eyes little indeed akin to mirth; and the loud laughter that rung around was hard to be borne when she thought of that room in the Laigh-Wynd, and the burial-ground of Glasgow Cathedral. But she had strength of heart to return courteous greetings to all her neighbours; and then going into the room where she slept, she closed the shutters, and lay down for an hour on her bed, shedding floods of tears for the sake of her dead Walter. Margaret's mind yielded to the cheerfulness about her; and she dressed herself in her best attire to attend a tea-party with her friend Mary Mitchell. Esther sang several songs to the neighbours as they came dropping in, and who said they thought they were entitled to ask that favour on a New-year's day; while poor Marion, with a new gaudy ribbon round her waist, seemed happy as a May-day queen; and, but for the sudden and causeless coming and going of her wayward smiles, would not have appeared to be in anything different from other human beings. All days in the year were alike to her; but she saw that there was something happy—she knew not what—and repeated the customary words she heard around, sometimes carelessly, as if they meant nothing, and sometimes with a momentary earnestness, as if her spirit, darkened as it was, caught a glimpse of the light of humanity, and saw something more distinctly in the appearances of this mortal life.

The poor people who inhabited this lane did right to make the most of their annual festivities, for it was to be a long time before such merriment was again to sound between its narrow walls. The Typhus fever had been showing itself here and there throughout the winter, and it now took possession of these old wooden tenements—creeping on, week after week, from one dark dwelling to another, till at last the long steep lane held more than a hundred sick, and life was gasping with difficulty on a multitude of beds. For some time it was known that the fever was somewhere in the lane; but few seemed to know in what house. But soon the young girls that were wont to go tripping down to the well, morning and evening, were not so frequent, and elderly persons took their place. Within a month after the first rumour of disease, every third or fourth house had its patients, and several small funerals had left the lane. The careless passenger, hurrying along on his own business down this thoroughfare between street and street, knew not that the dying and the dead were on both sides, and that he was surrounded by the close air of contagion.

Mrs Lyndsay was now a good deal broken down; and her mind took the alarm when she found that the fever was below and around her house. She thought at first of leaving the lane altogether, but she had no means; and, besides, what house in city or country is safe from the visit she feared? For herself she had no apprehensions; but should Margaret be taken ill, what would become of them all? Her terrors were too painful to be hidden from Margaret, and she was not found wanting in cheering and consoling trust. Her health was at that time better than it had ever been, and the friendship of Miss Wedderburne had lifted her up even above herself, and made her look on existence with less trepidation than she had for a while been able to do after her father's death. Her soul threw off every shadow of selfish fear; nor did she, on her own account, lose one hour's sleep when she knew that the fever was coming towards them down the lane. She saw now so distinctly that her mother's very life, and that of her poor sisters, depended upon her exertions, that, instead of trembling for her own sake, she felt, in the generous expansion of her loving heart, that she was perfectly safe. No retired hut, in a garden of its own, far away in the country by a river side, would have seemed a safer place for her than this airless and crowded lane, where infection had penetrated through the timbers of all the overhanging buildings. But she felt that her services might be needed night and day, and she was ready to watch by the sickbed. She had no reason to think, even for a moment, that their house would escape, and several times, during every day, she went into some silent corner, and fortified her heart with prayer.

The scholars of course all stayed away, for the school-room would have been a den of infection. One day the thoughtful little family were all sitting together at their work, when Esther laid aside some straw she had been plaiting, and said, "I am weary, weary, and must lie down!" She spoke somewhat sadly, and could not help giving a deep sigh. Her mother and Margaret took her to bed, and

she lay down without speaking, as if something sorrowful were passing within her soul. "Esther, my bairn, you are not very ill, surely —I wish you would speak." Esther said, with a low trembling voice, "It's the fever—and I fear, I fear, that I'm gaun to be ta'en away." Tears followed those words, and another long melancholy sigh. Margaret kissed her cheek, and applied her very softest, tenderest voice to the poor child's ear; but her soul was disquieted within her, and would not be comforted. The fear of death was upon her; and innocent as she was, and incapable of harming anything of God's creation, yet she had always seemed to think with quaking awe of the world to come. Visions, or sounds, or inconceivable thoughts, had visited her in her blindness from the region of sleep, and now the harmless being trembled as if she had been a great sinner.

The slow fire that had been kindled in her veins was not to be extinguished, and it continued to burn on, day after day, as if smothered and kept down, but not like a dying flame. Weakness, weariness, depression, and anxiety preyed upon the poor victim with visible ravages, and every morning the daylight showed a face touched anew by the fingers of death. Moanings came from her continually, and her mind wandered—not as such an innocent mind might have been thought to wander in delirium, but through ghastly and hideous places, that gave utterance to miserable words. Her mother was often unable to sit by her bedside, when such terrible thoughts were heard piercing her Esther's soul; but Margaret, strong in youth, stood the trial, and sat till sleep, or some other unknown mystery, set free her sister's brain from the phantoms. There was no want of medical advice. All that human skill could do was done: but the fever lurked in the strongholds of life, and by no power was to be expelled. Three weeks thus wore away; and if Esther was like death, sometimes lying without motion on her bed, so was Margaret, moving about continually, with her sweet face now like ashes, and her limbs weakened by want of rest. Her mother did all she could—but that was little; for she was not able, without assistance, to rise from her bed, and sometimes even from her chair. On Margaret depended everything—but at last an old neighbour, who cared nothing for infection, came in to assist her, and sat up with her, night about, with the afflicted child.

But, alas! the widow had now her own patient with her in the other room, for Marion also took the fever, and with her it was more rapidly mortal. A few days' sickness were all that the Innocent had to suffer. Her few thoughts were locked up, and she never spoke after the third day of the fever, except about an hour before she died. She then opened her eyes; and, as if cleared from the mist that for years had bewildered her, she uttered some intelligible expressions of love towards her mother. Her face had a less vacant look, and her eyes remained fixed upon those of her mother, instead of glancing away suddenly, as they had been long used to do. "Nacthing sae sweet as the sound o' Psalms in the kirk on the Sabbath-day—O, mother! Nacthing sae sweet! God must love the sound of our Esther's singing—I think I hear't the noo. They say angels sing."

These were her last words; and her mother thought that God had sent back reason to her spirit, at the very moment that He was taking it up to heaven.

While Marion lived, her mother felt towards her a love deeper than even she could herself know; but when her little bosom ceased to move, all was hushed in that mother's heart. The death of so utterly helpless a being was wept over by natural tears; but it could not, on her own account, be lamented. As long as her pulse beat, her mother had watched her as if upon her life her own had hung; and many indeed were the recollections of bypast things gathered round that helpless head; but when her Maker took to Himself the soul which, in His inscrutable wisdom, He had darkened during its short sojourn on earth, a melancholy mystery seemed at an end, and one all unfit for this life had been mercifully removed. She had been happy in her mild derangement; so tenderly treated that no hardship had reached her; no bodily miseries had ever painfully perplexed and confounded her; but her imperfect speech had often been about birds and flowers in their beauty, and the little she did know was all of kindness and love. Therefore her mother and Margaret both stood looking calmly upon her face—now pleasing and intelligent in death, as if she had enjoyed perfect reason; while her smile, that in life had been so wavering and inconstant, was immovable now, and liable to no change but that of fast-approaching decay.

In such extreme affliction, the presence of Miss Wedderburne would indeed have been an unspeakable blessing; but she could not, consistently with her most sacred duties, visit her poor friends during the prevalence of an infectious malady. She had at home two young sisters of her own, not so old as Esther and Marion, and she did not think that she ought to endanger them by attending at such sickbeds. Her mother, too, laid a positive prohibition upon her; and therefore she informed the Lyndsays that she could not see them in their distress. But she sent them wine, food, and money, and medical attendance, and lost no opportunity of conveying to them proofs of her unabated affection and regard. Her virtues were not founded in prudence, but they were guarded and guided by it; she saw distinctly the marks which conscience set on the scale of duty; and as far as blind mortals can act in the light of their imperfect wisdom, she never sacrificed to generous impulses that higher good, whose knowledge is a product of the thoughtful heart. All that Christian charity could give to the Lyndsays she gave, except her presence; and glad were both the widow and Margaret that their benefactress was not exposed to death in their dwelling. They knew her motives, and felt that in this, as in everything else, her conduct was wise and pious. What misery would have been added to all they now suffered, had infection been carried from their house into that of her who was their best earthly friend? And if it had sent to the grave those two beautiful children, whom sometimes she had brought with her to the lane—the pensive Harriet, with the dark eyes and raven locks, and Frances, the fairy, with golden hair and eyes so light-blue in the lustre of their perpetual smiles?

But although Miss Wedderburne visited not the house, yet she seemed to be often present in Esther's delirious dreams. "O, kind lady! do you come to comfort the poor blind lassie on her deathbed! Keep hold o' my hands, that they may not tear me frae you. Hear how the great serpent is hissing—the dragon who devours the soul!" Her mother and Margaret took her hands, as the child wished, for they hoped that the touch might change the horror of her dreams. They also repeated to each other the name of her whom Esther was dreaming of, that it might reach her spirit through her unsleeping ear, and make her think that her guardian angel was by her bedside. Love, and grief, and pity, made both these simple creatures, Alice and Margaret, skilful in administering to a mind diseased. They watched and followed every changing mood of Esther's mind, which they had long known so well; and none but themselves could have been able to relieve, as they often did, the agitations that disease was exciting in that soul, which, when the body was in health, lay serene in its beauty and its happiness, like some small secluded glen, where a rivulet murmurs on clear in all weathers—where sometimes up springs the lark with a song, and on whose gentle braes are lying, in the sunshine, a little peaceful flock.

"Look, mother—the expression of her face is quite changed all at once—far happier; you need not fear to look on it now!" Alice gazed upon her child, and two or three big tears fell upon her face. Esther put up her hand and wiped them away. "Is that you, Margaret, weeping for me? Dry up your tears, and weep no more. For I have awaked frae a fearsome dream. How is Marion?"—"Our Marion is with the Lord," said Alice with a calm voice. "And I, mother, may this night be with her in heaven! Is the lady near me? or was she but in a dream?"—They tried to hush Esther's voice; for they both feared that, in her extreme weakness, such an effort was dangerous. "O Death! where is thy sting?—O Grave! where is thy victory?"—said the blind child with her usual clear and silver voice, that sounded for a moment strong, as if she had been about to sing a hymn. Her eyelids had all along been shut—and they never opened more; her pale lips remained just as they were while she was speaking—and not even a sigh was heard when her pure spirit took its flight to heaven!

CHAPTER XXIII.

Margaret and her mother had now lived nearly two months alone, and they had become reconciled to the silence of their new condition. The stool on which Esther used to sit, and her own little round oak-table, on which her hands so readily found the lightest straw, as she was industriously pursuing her ingenious work, were not removed into the other room, but stood as before, and were often looked at as

something sacred belonging to the beloved dead. The few articles of her workmanship, some of them unfinished, were laid aside in a place where nothing could injure them, not to be parted with, but kept during her mother's lifetime as precious memorials of one who had known but little sorrow and no sin. It was sad to miss her voice that sung so sweetly to the passing hours—to hear no more her soft cautious footsteps stealing along the floor. That voice was already as the voice of other years; and those footsteps, deadened in memory by the weight of two months' solitary resignation, faintly sounded in the souls of the survivors, like something long since heard in a dream. But, according as the too distinct images of sense faded away under the softening power of time, and relieved their hearts from too severe a pressure, did all purely spiritual remembrances deepen there, till her mother and sister came at last to see only their Esther's soul. Her name now gave no pang; it was pronounced by them both without faltering, but in a low and solemn voice; and always at that word a more serene stillness seemed to overspread the room, and a heavenly communion, as of mortal and immortal, to subsist between them and her who had gone to heaven.

Nor was poor Marion forgotten. A thousand little tender cares and anxieties had daily watched that helpless creature, and never had she been allowed to disappear for many minutes from the sight of her mother or her sister. A familiar object at all times to their eyes, yet never had a profound interest left the inexpressive face of the Innocent; and with incessant and yearning affection had they tended her whom God had sent so utterly weak into this world. If at any time sickness or pain afflicted her, how tenderly had they ever treated such a patient! Her soul, although darkened, was yet made of imperishable light. The poor creature could repeat her prayers, nor could it be known by others what thoughts came wandering into her spirit, when she too knelt down, and folded her little harmless hands before God. Certain it was, that her nature was restored and revived during her dying hours; and the intelligence that had revisited her countenance at last, now enabled her mother and sister to accompany her in thought to heaven, and to see there, not only all tears wiped away from her eyes, but all darkness rolled off for ever from her immortal spirit.

It was thus that, by the middle of May, perfect peace was in the widow's house. Laurence frequently wrote home, and always in affection, hope, and happiness. They who had been unfit for this world had been mercifully removed. Margaret, now a young woman in the perfection of her youth, and instructed by sorrow in the duties of life, had no gloom in her eyes but such as passed by like a cloud; and the widow herself, although she had buried much joy in the grave, had yet enough to bestow upon that sole survivor, and felt that round her were now entwined all the threads of love and of life.

The disease had now left the lane, and everything went on as before. A good many scholars came back to school; but a few that had been among Margaret's chief favourites were to return no more. The hum of murmuring voices was again heard from morning till noon, and

by degrees, tones once familiar were forgotten. The happy children, although some of them had lost their sisters in that fever, danced, and laughed, and played as before; death might take them away into his dark chambers, but life kept joyful all that belonged to her; and the thoughtless creatures no more looked sad, because their companions had been carried to the grave, than the flowers of the field pine away when feet have trampled down their sisters blooming by their sides on the same dewy turf.

Margaret Lyndsay had reached that time of life when the character grows as much in one single year as during all its previous existence. Thoughts formerly dim or transient were now clear and permanent in her mind; many feelings about her own estate, and that of other human beings, crowded in upon her heart as if from a new-opened source; things that formerly passed before her eyes unobserved or not understood, now were seen to be manifestations of good or of evil, misery or happiness; the chances and changes that had diversified her own humble lot were now beheld by her at work all around; the future, although it lay before her shut up in darkness, was often pierced by the involuntary power of her mind; and, feeling that a destiny yet unknown lay upon her that might be severe, she thought of herself and her condition often with a solemn awe that never dashed her fortitude, but that tamed her smiles, and gave to a countenance, naturally bright and cheerful, a permanent expression, almost of sadness, which it was impossible to behold without emotion in one so very young and so very beautiful.

At such a period of life, the friendship of Miss Wedderburne assisted the benign and gracious power of Nature. Her refined manners were insensibly imitated by Margaret, whose own character was so susceptible of elegance; her elevated sentiments found in the pure heart of the orphan a soil where they at once took root and grew; and the delightful sense of self-worthiness that was thus inspired by an equal communion with one whom she thought so far superior to herself, not only in rank, but in knowledge and in virtue, expanded all the faculties of her being, and made the humble creature rejoice in a meek and unpresumptuous confidence. Above all, the other kindnesses of Miss Wedderburne, in Margaret's heart, was her kindness to her poor mother, who was always perfectly happy for several days after a visit from their benefactress. Nothing delighted her daughter so much as to see honour done to her mother's character. Well did she know its sorely tried and unfailing excellence, supported by faith; and while Miss Wedderburne sat speaking to her parent, Margaret would be mute, listening to instruction that came with double force from the lips of that enlightened lady, as yet unafflicted, but the friend of affliction, and from the lips of a poor widow that had drank deep of the cup of grief, but had found at the bottom not bitter dregs, but the pure waters of comfort and peace.

But the visits of Miss Wedderburne did not turn away the hearts of the widow and her daughter from their lowly neighbours. During all the infectious sickness that had at last thinned the house, those neighbours had been found wanting in none of those duties which

human beings owe one another, more especially at such times. Many of them, too, had experienced the kindness of this same lady, or of her friends, in the same afflictions; and in the evenings, when one or two of those humble folk came to sit for an hour by the ingle, they often spoke of Miss Wedderburne, and of the loveliness which a charitable life gave to the fairest lady. The friendship of such a being was too great and deep a blessing to awaken pride. The gratitude it inspired went into the depth of the heart; and, when Alice and Margaret thought within themselves what would have become of them but for her, they felt no inclination to elevate themselves above the poorest of the poor, but to fall down upon their knees before Him who had sent one to comfort them in their distress, to support their bodies with needful food, and to cheer their spirits within them by the beauty of holiness.

Margaret had another friend, one in the same rank of life with herself, whose cold and heartless conduct towards her at this time gave her affectionate heart much pain—that was Mary Mitchell. During the time the fever was in the house, Margaret thought little of her absence, although she wondered that no inquiries ever came from her through the neighbours; but now that the lane was safe, it seemed cruel in her never to call upon her friend after such great loss. It happened that Margaret was taking a walk by herself, one quiet evening, in the Meadows, when she met Mary Mitchell, and, in the impulse of her warm heart, she cordially took her by the hand, and, with a half-upbraiding smile, asked why old friends should be forgotten? After some intermission, Mary seemed glad to see her, and they walked along as they used to do in other days. But Mary soon became cold and reserved, and would not speak freely either about herself or her former friend. Margaret soon saw and felt that there was a change in her heart; and that change gave her pain, for she had loved Mary well, and had bestowed upon one who had not much that was amiable about her but good-humour, a free share of the affection that was overflowing in her young, innocent, and happy heart. To lose the kindness of a human being, and one of her own age and condition, was so painful to Margaret Lyndsay, that the tears trickled down her cheek. As she was going to say something tender to Mary, if possible to rekindle old affections, a young gentleman met them, and familiarly shook hands with her companion, whose face blushed with pleasure and confusion. He was evidently much above their condition, and spoke to Mary with an air of confidence and condescension. In a few minutes he went away, and the two girls sitting down on a bench together, Margaret ventured to say, that such as they were ought not, on any account, to have such acquaintance. Mary seemed displeased and irritated, and said that she was old enough to take care of herself, and wanted no advice. Free as Margaret was in her nature from all suspicion, she knew in sadness that Mary Mitchell was now a lost girl. Her dress—her air—her speech—her countenance, all had undergone a sort of change. That careless and cheerful laughter was gone, and something evidently lay upon her mind that damped her spirits.

Margaret knew at once that her companion, with whom she had spent so many innocent hours, had fallen either into gross imprudence or into guilt; and she boldly said, taking her kindly by the hand, "Mary, Mary, O be warned by me, and never speak to that person more! If you do, you will be ruined for ever, and all your family brought to sorrow and disgrace."—"Margaret Lyndsay, I wish you would look after your own doings, and let me alone to judge for myself. I never went a-sailing in boats with a sweetheart on a Sabbath-day. You have as much reason to repent as I have." This was a cruel blow to Margaret's heart, and her hand, that held Mary's, insensibly let go its hold. Never could she think of Harry Needham without tears; and now the very hour of his death was brought back before her—the rush of the waters—and her own often repented sin. Her heart began to sob as it would break, and it was some time before she could speak. "Ay, ay, Mary! I behaved ill, indeed, on that unhappy day, and, if I were to live till I was ninety years old, never, never, could I forget it, nor cease to acknowledge my great guilt."—"Then why attack me, when you are sae much waur yoursel? I never was the cause o' ony ane that liked me being drowned."—"No, Mary, you never were. But you know that I had a long and dangerous fever after the death of Harry Needham, and that I repented my guilt often on my knees to God, when you yourself were in the room, only our two selves, and then you wept for me. Oh! why this cruel charge? Both my little sisters, too, you ken, are dead; and, wae's me, my mother is no strong. Will you be friends with me again, Mary? and, if ever I give you advice again, it will be in a better spirit, and you will not be angry with me any more." Had Mary Mitchell been but on the verge of guilt, her heart could not have withstood this appeal, for it was not destitute of kind affections. But her innocence and her virtue were gone, and she felt abased before the purity of Margaret Lyndsay. She therefore, in self-defence, cherished anger in her heart, and would not be appeased. She had also thought that Margaret's beauty had been observed with too admiring eyes by her seducer, and sudden jealousy had entered into her unconfiding bosom. Now there was an opportunity of quarrelling with Margaret for ever, and, in the selfishness of fearful and suspicious vice, she again addressed the weeping girl. "Many a sair heart you made, Miss Lyndsay, that Sabbath your English lover was drowned. He had a father and a mother, and, he used to tell us himsel, four sisters. What could ye hae said, or how would ye hae looked, had ye been present amang them a' when the letter was opened, telling them that he had been drowned?" Margaret sat gasping for breath. "I would have wished to die, as I do now; for, if it were not for my mother's sake, I would like to die, and to be buried down at Leith yonder beside my Harry. Too true it is, that I was the cause of his death. I had persuaded myself that I was not, but I know now that I was; but, O Mary, Mary! I am mair an object o' pity than o' blame, especially from a friend and a lassie o' my ain age like you." Margaret now felt something coming to her relief—partly conscience

—partly the power of innocence—partly the holy anger of nature, which was thus unjustly smote within her sanctuary, and which, at first thrown down, rose up now in her own vindication. "Mary Mitchell, we are both sinners, and as such we will both be called before the judgment-seat of the great God. If we are to be friends no more, will you kiss me before we part?"—"I hae nae ill-will at you; but there is nae need o' that. We're no likely to meet again, for I live noo on the ither side o' the town. I wish you weel—gude-day to you. It's very true we hae a' our faults, and I hae nae wish to be better than my neebours." With these words Mary Mitchell walked away, and left Margaret sitting by herself in tears below the shadows of the elm-trees. For a while her heart communed with itself, and was soon restored to peace. She knew herself to be free from all vicious thoughts, and disposed, in the strength of Christianity, to discharge whatever duties God might lay upon her in her humble lot.—She then thought of Miss Wedderburne, and, wiping away her tears, her face was soon restored to its former sweet tranquillity, for her heart was calmed, and the Orphan entered with a smile into the Widow's house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Margaret had hoped that, as the summer advanced, her mother's spirits, which had been much depressed of late, would rise to their former quiet level; but in this hope she was sorely disappointed. The mind of the widow seemed to have lost its tone irrecoverably; and there was something sadder than resignation now breathed over her whole demeanour. A letter came from Laurence, telling how he had been engaged in the desperate service of cutting out a brig from below a battery, and had been put upon the list of midshipmen. His mother read it with tears of joy, but immediately after relapsed into her deepest melancholy. Not even could the frequent visits of Miss Wedderburne bring a steady smile over her countenance. She often retired to her room, desiring Margaret not to disturb her for an hour or so; and, on coming back, she did not look like a person refreshed by sleep, but pale, languid, and exhausted. Sometimes she fixed her eyes for a long time together on Margaret, while her cheeks were thin and sunk, and she uttered not a word. At midnight, when she thought her daughter was asleep, she sat frequently up in bed, and gave vent to long deep groans, praying, at the same time, for a speedy release to her sufferings, or greater fortitude to support them till all was over. Everything combined to convince Margaret that her mother thought herself in a dangerous way; and the poor girl knew well that no groundless fears ever entered so serene and resigned a heart. She began to fear that the last earthly calamity was about to befall her, and that her mother was soon

going to join her husband and her children. Alice was indeed a dying woman.

Margaret also observed, that Miss Wedderburne had several times visited the house when she was out on some errand, contrary to her usual practice. After such visits, her mother, although seemingly composed, was always more mournful and melancholy, and once or twice wept as Margaret came into the room.

At last, one Sabbath evening, Margaret was desired by her mother to place chairs for the old clergyman and Miss Wedderburne, from whom she was expecting a visit. There was something more than commonly solemn in her voice; but that solemnity in no degree lessened its extreme tenderness towards her daughter. Margaret placed pillows behind her mother as she sate in the old arm-chair, and could not help thinking that her faded face seemed almost as near to death as the face of that venerable old woman who had sat there palsied for several years, in the midst of a family now nearly extinguished. "Thank you, Margaret—you have been a dutiful child all your days; they who behave best to their parents when living, remember them longest when dead."

The old clergyman and that beautiful young lady now came in, and they all sat together almost mute. Alice was the first to speak. "Margaret, let not your heart be utterly cast down, when, before the two human beings we both most reverence, I tell thee, my child, that I have not many days to live. Nay, this very night may my soul be demanded of me." No one spoke. Margaret looked first on one and then on another; but both countenances were calm and fixed, and no hope was found in expression so full of the inward conviction of the soul. "For some months, Margaret, pain has been gnawing close upon my very heart. There, where your cheek in infancy often lay, has it pleased God to fasten the arrow of a slow death. I have been forced to speak at last. But no skill could have aided me. I thought that I had borne my Walter's death like an imperfect Christian; but my heart has been sorely troubled—and its grief has rankled here, till I have been brought near to the hour when I am to be mercifully released!"

Now indeed Margaret knew why her mother had often sought to be alone, that she might wrestle with agony unseen by human eyes. Oh! thoughtless and unreflecting one—not to have suspected, long before, that some hidden trouble had seized her parent! But now it was too late to upbraid herself; nor could she yet find voice to utter one single word, neither would a single tear fall from her eyes. She sat like one that has received the doom of death; and for a little space saw nothing in the room but moving and glimmering figures, although they who sat there were motionless, and neither foot nor hand nor head yet stirred at the ceasing of the widow's words.

The old man lifted up his withered hand, and prayed. Margaret was somewhat revived by the weak tremulous voice that had for so many long years been employed in the service and the worship of God. But the words spake of death, and of a soul about to be

released from its bonds in a prison of clay. They held out no hope, except the bright hope of eternal life. She looked at her mother, and her face was perfectly calm. Now and then her eyes were raised up to heaven, and her pale, pale hands lifted devoutly upon her knees. Her lips moved in short whispered ejaculations; and when the prayer was done, she looked over to the old man with a smile, gently bowed her head, and said, "Thank you, sir, for the great comfort you have given me!" The old man took Margaret by the hand, and laid one of his own upon her head, that was bowed down in affliction almost to the floor. "Fear not, my daughter, for yourself—my young friend here will take you to her own house; and repine not, that, after her mortal pains are over, your mother is about to enter into the joy of the Lord."—"Oh! mother, have you no pain just now—have you no pain?"—"No, Margaret, I have no pain—and perhaps all my worst pangs are over." Margaret sank down quietly, and without any agitation, upon her knees; and, inspired with a holy fervour, poured out her soul audibly to God. Never had more tender beseechings reached heaven, from earthly lips kindled by filial love. Miss Wedderburne knelt down also by her side—the old man wept almost his last tears—and the dying woman said, "Is this death?" It was not the evening of her last day—but she lay down to rise up no more; and, before the next ringing of the Sabbath bells, Alice Lyndsay had happily breathed her last, free from all pain, even in the arms of her own Margaret.

And did Margaret Lyndsay wish to live another day, when she looked round the room, and felt in the dead silence that all the family but herself were now dust? "O, my dear Laurence! art thou yet alive?" "Fear not," said Miss Wedderburne; "both you and your brother will yet be happy. Are the decrees of God dreadful to bear, Margaret, or do you feel them all to be holy and just?"—"Poor worm that I am—shall I lift up my voice from the clay against my Maker? No, no. I am willing at this hour to render up my soul—I am willing to live on, if it should be in poverty, shame, and tears, till my pulse feels his decree." Her friend began to converse with her even beside the calm countenance of her dead mother; and Margaret, supported by her enlightened piety, scarcely shed a tear. "Till within these three years or so, my mother told me herself, that no one had ever been so happy on this earth as she; and, since her troubles began, God did not desert her; and she was often—often perfectly blessed. Now her pangs are over; and may I, may I believe that she is now an angel in heaven?"—"Yes, Margaret, she is with her Saviour, and so is Esther—so is poor Marion, she who was a helpless one on earth, but is now more glorious in heaven than the wisest of the living children of men."—"Oh! do you fear to mention my father's name? Must he be shut out from the gates of heaven, when those he loved on earth are admitted into the Holy presence?"—"The judgments of God are dark, and our eyes are feeble to read them; but what sayest thine own heart?"—"That God has forgiven him!"

Margaret Lyndsay would not leave the lane till after her mother's

funeral. The same worthy people who had formerly taken care of Esther and Marion, when her mother and she were at Glasgow, received her for a few days into their house, and saw all necessary preparations made for the interment. When all was over, the house empty, and no trace left on this earth of those who had so lately inhabited it, Margaret paid her farewell visit to all her neighbours, who gave her their blessing, many of them not without weeping, and she then went to live in the house of Miss Wedderburne.

CHAPTER XXV.

Margaret Lyndsay was now lifted out of the dim and obscure dwelling of poverty into a mansion rich in all the comforts and elegancies of refined life. She was in a new world. Everything was still, regular, orderly, and graceful in all the rooms. Intelligence and taste ruled over the character of the whole, alike visible on the walls, and the floors, and the furniture of the house. Poor Margaret was indeed a novice in all such things; but she felt the effect in her very heart of all that tranquil arrangement which as yet she did not understand, and a gentle wonder and surprise mixed with her gratitude, as she lay down to rest for the first night, beneath the roof of her benefactress, and in her own little bedroom, where everything had been prepared for her under the direction of Miss Wedderburne herself. Nay, that benevolent lady came into her room, after she had lain down, and spoke cheerfully to the orphan. Soon all was silent; and the moonlight glimmered upon the floor of Margaret's room through the yellow curtains. God had given her an asylum; and she vowed to show her gratitude by a life devoted to her duty, and, if possible, void of offence towards both her heavenly and her earthly protectors. She lay awake great part of the night; and thought, with almost unpainful tears, of those whom she had survived, and whom, notwithstanding her present lot, she almost wished to follow to the realms of peace. But although, in her profound affection for the dead, she felt as if it would be a happy thing to join them in another world, yet there were feelings unwithered and unfaded in her young innocent heart that were to make this life pleasant and bright; and when towards the morning she fell asleep, it was with delightful anticipation of becoming the friend of the two beautiful children who were henceforth to be committed to her charge, and of doing all she could to keep them in the ways of innocence and peace.

In a few weeks Margaret Lyndsay was the delight of every one in the house. As for the two girls, Harriet and Frances, they danced around her during their play-hours in perpetual glee. Not one spark of love was dead in Margaret's bosom;—her tears had extinguished nothing—and her heart had the same power of affection as

if it had never followed a funeral. Every evening and every morning she heard the girls say their prayers along with their sister. She always kissed them both before they rose up from their knees. What she could teach them was taught with a gentle voice; and when she took them into the Meadows, whose walks she knew so well, the gladness and the beauty of the fair creatures completely occupied her soul, and chained it down from wandering too far off into the glooms and the griefs of the past. Sometimes she would think —"Oh! if my mother could look down from heaven, and see how gracious the Almighty has been to me!" And the belief that it might be even so, often settled down upon her grateful heart.

Mrs Wedderburne, who had been several years a widow, was in delicate health, and required every day more and more of her daughter's attention. She was perfectly satisfied with Margaret's sweet disposition and virtuous principles; and although she had a good deal of family pride, which was not altogether unobservable in her manners, yet so much true benevolence shone over the fine features of her faded countenance, that the stateliness of her demeanour had even a charm that the humble and meek orphan felt with a sort of reverent admiration. She was always dressed in widow's weeds, and with exactest care, as if it were due to her husband to wear, even with elegance, those garments, whose colour was never to be changed till her sables were laid aside for a shroud. Margaret's mournful history was, of course, known to her in all its particulars; and the grateful girl could not restrain her tears, when that face, which she had at first feared almost to look upon in its somewhat haughty aspect, smiled upon her with the utmost benignity, and seemed to be almost as sweet as that of Miss Wedderburne. "I give you the charge of my two children, Margaret; and if they but resemble yourself, I shall be satisfied." To be loved and respected by such noble-minded persons as these, made Margaret happy, although an orphan in the world; and seeing already the reward of good conduct, not only in comfort, competence, and peace, but in the love and approbation of the virtuous, she said to herself—"As long as I am good, what have I to fear? My mother was happy on her deathbed, yet who ever suffered like her, both in body and in soul!"

Days, weeks, months, passed on—and now here was no eye that could have seen—no ear that could have heard, from Margaret Lyndsay's appearance or language, that she was the daughter of poor parents, and had lived almost all her days among the very humblest people. To be sure, her parents, although poor, had both possessed characters much above common. Walter Lyndsay had been a man of mind and of manners; and from her mother Margaret could have learned nothing that was not good in its meekness and simplicity. But now to the truth, and sincerity, and openness of her own natural demeanour, was added unconscious grace from the observance of those to whom grace was native. And over all was spread an air of humility, so opposite to that of humiliation, that betokened, at all times, a deep remembrance in the orphan's soul of the state from which she had been so benevolently taken, of

almost utter friendlessness and destitution, and, at the same time, a delighted gratitude towards her benefactors. She had no need to keep a guard upon herself, lest she should ever forget her situation. She could not forget it, as long as she saw the smiles of Harriet and Frances, and the approving looks of their mother and sister. To do her duty to them was enough to occupy her whole soul, sleeping and waking. Month after month, her grief for the dead became more like joy; and sometimes it was joy indeed, when, in the silence of night, she thought she heard Esther singing a hymn; and carried the imagined voice into her dreams of a family met together in heaven.

Nor did Margaret Lyndsay forget her friends in the lane, and at Braehead. Nothing could ever obliterate from her heart one remembrance of the life she had passed in both; and if prayers could have brought back father and mother and sisters from the grave, happy would she have yet been to have left her present benefactors with a blessing, to have gone back into the utmost darkness and depths of poverty, and to have been a hard-working, poor, unnoticed woman all the years of her life. None of her former friends seemed to envy her happiness—for they saw her nature to be meek and lowly as before—and she had it now in her power to do them essential service. Miss Wedderburne's charities were not confined; and she often consulted Margaret about the most deserving and needy families. The windows of those two dim rooms in the lane often brought the tears into the orphan's eyes, as she thought of other days so full of joy and of grief;—and sometimes, when the present was insufficient to satisfy the love of her soul, that yearned for closer communion with the dear beings of past times, she would go by herself into the wide burial-ground of the Greyfriars Church, and sit down for an hour by her mother's grave—a green mound, with two lesser heaps close to it—and all three, like many hundred others in that ample cemetery, without a memorial-stone—which is often felt, in the silent oblivion of time, to be needless alike for rich and poor.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The increasing infirmities of her mother, who was seldom able to leave her own room till the afternoon, now kept Miss Wedderburne almost constantly occupied in the discharge of her filial duties, so that Harriet and Frances were left to the sole management of Margaret Lyndsay. Miss Wedderburne often contrasted in her own mind that tranquil and happy attention which she was now paying her parent, with the anxious and agonising solicitude which Margaret had been called upon to suffer on the same account in such very opposite circumstances. Here all kinds of comfort, every soothing indulgence which sickness required—silence, warmth, fresh air,

noiseless sleep at all hours, when its influence might steal upon the patient, were possessed by her mother. And if such were the benefits which wealth conferred on the sick, corresponding ones were enjoyed by herself watching by the sick-bed. How different had been the lot of poor Alice Lyndsay—how different the trials of Margaret! There the soul was left to its own solitary and unsupported self—in thick and confined air—surrounded often by din and tumult—the cares of the living interfering often with those of the dying—and the approach of death seen distinctly nearer and nearer every day, with nothing to veil the terrors of his countenance. To her who had gone through such trials, and came out of them resigned and happy, Miss Wedderburne now looked up in inward humility of spirit; and while she still admitted those distinctions of rank by which the orphan was in one sense greatly her inferior, the very feeling of that accidental inferiority served only to heighten the delight in her intrinsic worth, and to impart to the sisterly affection she felt towards Margaret, an endearing character of protecting tenderness and pity.

Harriet and Frances Wedderburne had hitherto received only the heartfelt instructions of a home education. All their natural feelings had been fostered by assiduous culture. Nothing selfish had been suffered to grow up in their nature; and they were strong, glad, and free in pity, charity, gentleness, and love. Their minds kept pace with their hearts, the one becoming unconsciously wise as the other was consciously pure. So their manners were gay and graceful—their talk always about happy things—and their thoughts and feelings the same, except the just perceptible and uniting difference caused by the small difference of age. From these beautiful and happy creatures Margaret Lyndsay learned much while she was their teacher; and her understanding quickly expanded with her increasing knowledge, as she read with them the books of history, the tales, real or imaginary, of human life, and the writings of divine-minded men, judiciously selected by Miss Wedderburne or her wise advisers. The inoffensive simplicities of her speech, and all the more marked peculiarities of her dialect were soon rejected by her fine and delicate ear, when she heard nothing similar to them; so that, in a few months, Margaret Lyndsay, the governess, could be distinguished from those present of higher birth, even by the best instructed eye, only by an apparel somewhat simpler, and a demeanour in its unobtrusive gentleness bordering on timidity, but perfectly free from awkwardness or restraint.

Miss Wedderburne was, with all her noble acquirements, also what is called an accomplished woman—a linguist, a painter, and a musician. She had taught her young sisters something of other languages than their own, and the elements of these arts. Margaret Lyndsay, although she had seldom sung when Esther was alive—for no voice could compete with that of the blind child—knew well all Scotland's melodies, and she soon acquired some knowledge of music. With quick preceptions, and now in the ripened powers of womanhood, she joined Harriet and Frances in those of their tasks

over which she was not yet able to preside; and, long within the year, she was fit to teach what she almost intuitively had learned. After she had made some progress, her advances were rapid; and the orphan girl, brought in poverty and destitution from that miserable lane, was now in all things a gentlewoman, and worthy to sit in any parlour or saloon in the land. There may be something in birth; but hers had not been mean, either by the father or mother's side. The Lyndsays, although now a faded, almost an extinguished family, had been highly respectable for many generations; and the Craigs had long been dwellers on the same soil, and in poverty and hardship had lived decently in their farmhouses, not poor either in intelligence or virtue. Margaret Lyndsay, therefore, though lowly, was respectably born; and in her appeared what, with due culture, was the native character of the race.

Margaret had led this happy and useful life for upwards of a year and a half, when Richard Wedderburne, who had been finishing his education at a German university, returned home. His arrival diffused a new character over all the house. His mother's health seemed to revive in the presence of her son; and the habits of retirement which had so long prevailed in the family, in some measure gave way before the wide friendships which subsisted between the Wedderburnes and the first people both in city and country. In consequence of this, Margaret lived more than ever secluded with her young charge; and, when she was present in company, sat silent and retired, with that fine feeling of her situation in the family which marked her behaviour alike in the small fireside circle, and in assemblages of ceremony or state. Her meek and mild beauty could not pass unobserved and unadmired upon any occasion; but she was linked in happy and humble love with her two dear girls, and was with them almost from morning to night in their own cheerful school-room. For some weeks Richard Wedderburne merely looked at her as a lovely and unassuming girl, who was faithful to her trust—and no more; and he saw her come and go without taking any further notice of her, than what kindness and courtesy dictated to one who was a perfect gentleman. As for Margaret Lyndsay, she regarded him as the head of the house—as her young master—the brother of her benefactress, and of the children she so dearly loved. His manners towards her she felt to be such as she would have expected from the son of such a lady; and not a little pride touched her heart, when he expressed himself delighted with the progress his little sisters had made, and said, "But Georgina has told me the character and history of Miss Lyndsay; and I believe that, under her care, they will be as good as they are graceful."

Richard Wedderburne was an accomplished young man, and fond of society, of which he was the ornament and delight. But after so long an absence from his home, in a foreign country, and in the dull routine of a college, his heart lay in domestic enjoyments, and he became more and more attached to his own library and the evening drawing-room, when none were present but his mother and elder sister—or, occasionally, Margaret and her pupils. He had heard

the story of the orphan with an interest which could not but be gradually deepened by such knowledge as those hours gave him of her pure, simple, and grateful character. He had such pride as became the heir of an ancient and distinguished family; and therefore he was entitled to look upon Margaret Lyndsay as a dependant on the kindness of his mother and sister. This he did without the slightest derogation from the admirable qualities of her character; and thus, for a considerable time, he was prevented from admitting into his heart one single feeling beyond that of mere human kindness towards the beautiful orphan. But her sweet voice, although seldom heard, and then only when she was addressed, yet found its way day by day further into his heart. The soft and humble expression of those large downcast hazel eyes, lifted up in beaming tenderness towards his young sisters, sometimes came upon him in his solitude; and that lovely figure, moving in and out of the room on such quiet steps, sometimes like a light and sometimes like a shadow, he was willing to confess to himself was one of the most naturally elegant he had ever seen, and nothing less than wonderful in one so humbly bred and born. Still he was not in love; but certainly he loved Margaret Lyndsay—and that was more fatal to such a deep-feeling, strong-thinking youth as Richard Wedderburne. As yet it was kindness—gentleness—pity—respect—admiration; but her voice, her smile, her face, her eyes, her person, were ever before him; and he had not been two months in his mother's house, till Margaret Lyndsay was dearer to him than life itself, and the object of a disturbed and engrossing passion.

Richard Wedderburne was a young man of an ambitious mind, and he was entitled to be so. Well-born, highly connected, with a finished education, rich, and possessing great talents, he was justified in looking forward to the highest civil offices in the country. He knew the hopes his mother, his sister, and all his friends had formed of his career in life. And shall he marry an obscure orphan—the child of a mechanic—one who so lately had lived the life of a pauper among paupers? The thought was repelled instantly. But in the evening, Margaret Lyndsay was again before him in the "dim parlour twilight"—or in the room with his little sisters—when he went, not altogether for their sakes, to look at their drawings, or hear a song. To all other temptations he was superior, in the delicacy of his feeling and the strength of his understanding. But this overcame him wholly—his senses and his soul alike; and he often wished, in anger and agony, that he had not returned to Scotland—for he felt that his happiness was lost for ever, and that this poor orphan girl was more delightful to him than all his proudest—highest—most splendid hopes in this life, now seemingly vain, idle, and worthless to his impassioned and enamoured spirit.

Meanwhile Margaret Lyndsay was perfectly happy in her quiet life. She was contented to sit whole days with Harriet and Frances, or to walk out with them in the sweet spring days, and enjoy the sunshine of this beautiful world. She was almost as much a child as themselves, when out of the rooms where their lessons were learned;

and, having no disturbing hopes or wishes—no longing anxieties about the joys or griefs of future life—but a perfect reliance on the goodness of her Maker, and a delighted gratitude towards those whose house was in her case an orphan asylum, she saw nothing around or near her but what smiled on the pleasant surface of existence, and never for a moment suspected that she was herself the disturber of a noble heart even to madness, and in the passionate thoughts of that mind considered to be one who might either be for ever the bliss or the bane of his whole mortal life. She had been taken from sorrow, want, and almost despair, and made happy at last by those whose goodness would not suffer misery to live before it; so how could she ever dream that one like herself, rescued from death by the hand of charity, could become so dear to any human being, especially to one raised above her to such an infinite height, as to make him hang upon her love for everlasting enjoyment or everlasting despair! So she smiled as before in her serene beauty; and now Richard Wedderburne felt that Margaret Lyndsay must be his wife, or that he was lost for ever.

He knew well that such an event as his marriage with this friendless orphan would be little less than a deathblow to his mother. As to the opinion of the world, that was a mere nothing now to him, proud as he was; for to yield up his love to it would be to make a sacrifice even of his own soul. Therefore, after a long and desperate internal struggle, he determined to make an avowal of his affection to Margaret, and to get her to swear to marry him, upon his mother's death. That word sent a shudder to his heart; but he knew himself too well to suffer it long to distract him; for if Margaret loved him, and promised to be his wife some day, however distant, that was enough to raise him from misery to bliss, and might his beloved and honoured parent live to the last and most extreme period of human life. Neither was he presumptuous in his superior rank or the consciousness of his own worth and endowments. But still he could scarcely doubt that Margaret, an orphan, and attached to no one else, would be brought to love him, and seal her faith by an oath, which would leave his soul tranquil and confiding in the future. His purpose was fixed, and no time was to be lost in putting it into execution.

His sister had gone out to pay a visit with the young girls, and his mother was in her bedroom. So he went in, with an agitated heart, to the little parlour where Margaret was sitting, with two or three drawings of Harriet and Frances on the table before her, and preparing them for frames which she herself had gilded. He took her hand with vehement passion, and a few hurried words were enough to carry surprise, fear, and astonishment to the soul of the trembling orphan. She sat speechless and thunderstruck, unable to believe what she heard, yet unable to think that this could be a mere mockery of her who was so dependent and defenceless. Richard Wedderburne poured out his whole soul into ears now able to hear distinctly what he uttered; and then said—"Margaret, will you swear it—will you swear it? If so, God will reward you;—if not, I am doomed to perpetual despair."

The heart of Margaret Lyndsay was wholly free from the slightest touch of passion towards him who now so earnestly pleaded. In her prayers she had joined his name along with those of all them she so gratefully and tenderly loved. She had looked up to him as a being almost of a superior order—so mild—so courteous—so brilliant—so wise—so noble, and so good. Was all this that she heard possible in nature? And did such a man so love her as to prefer her to all the world, and stake his whole happiness on a few words from her lips? It was an incomprehensible thought; and therefore she was calm in the presence of his perturbation, and dared at last to lift up her voice.

"I was brought into this house, a dejected, forlorn, and almost heart-broken orphan, by your sister, and, sir, your mother has indeed treated me like her own child. I am ready to die for their sakes, or for yours; but, so help me God, let me not bring misery into their hearts; for what atonement could I now make for such sin? Oh! have other thoughts of me, for I am altogether unworthy of your love. Go, go, and I will leave the house for ever. Go, I beseech you upon my knees!" Richard Wedderburne started up, and, afraid to agitate her further, raised her tenderly from the ground, kissed her forehead, and hurried out of the room.

In one hour, all life was changed to Margaret Lyndsay. Nothing so wild and confounding had ever smote her in a dream. A confused sense of guilt and ingratitude dashed all her thoughts, and to have heard such words seemed of itself a crime. The wife of the only son of her benefactress!—The sister of Miss Wedderburne, and of Harriet and Frances!—To swear upon the Bible to deceive them all! To live as a base, artful, selfish, and designing hypocrite, in their presence, even when eating their bread, and looking on their smiles, and going along with them on Sabbath to church; and all this in return for being rescued from want and ruin, and cherished almost in their very bosoms! "No, no," fervently exclaimed the orphan in a deep low voice, "rather would I die, and lay my head down beside my mother, and Esther, and Marion, than wickedly bring misery, wrath, dissension, and shame, into this house, sacred to me—in my happiness or in my wretchedness—now and for evermore!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

Although Margaret Lyndsay was not one of those young persons whose nervous sensibility is so tender, that any strong emotion seems to render them in a great measure irrational, and wholly incapable for a season of performing any of their duties; yet this sudden declaration of love from one to whom she had always looked up from the most respectful distance, so shook her very frame, that for several days she was confined to her bed or to her room. Miss

Wedderburne was unceasing in her affectionate tendance; and, wholly unaware of the true nature of her patient's illness, frequently mentioned her brother's name in the course of conversation, and said how truly concerned he was for Margaret's indisposition. The poor girl was glad to hide her face in the dimness of the room, and felt sometimes as if it were burning with the blushes, or chilled with the paleness, of conscious guilt. She frequently heard, too, the footsteps of Richard Wedderburne in the house, and they seemed to her hurried and irregular; and more than once his voice was close to the door of the room, making anxious inquiries about her from his sister. All this was calculated but to aggravate the fever of disquietude in her veins; and for about a day her illness assumed a very serious appearance. But, by strong efforts, she succeeded in tranquillising her mind; and then the frame gradually recovered its strength, till again she was able to be with Frances and Harriet in their little elegant boudoir.

She had, however, been altogether unable to bring her mind to any resolution how to act in her perilous situation. She saw what her duty was, and she was determined to do it; for her conscience was strong and clear in its purity, and not to be blinded or deceived. Never could she be the wife of Richard Wedderburne; and therefore it was necessary that she should inform those of the proposal he had made, from whom gratitude as well as conscience imperatively required she should hide nothing that so deeply affected their happiness. But how could she do this, with delicacy to his feelings who had preferred her as he said to the whole world? She owed him everything that was respectful and tender—everything that could be made consistent, anyhow, with her plain and obvious duty to his mother and his sister; and therefore how could she, a poor friendless orphan, dare to open her lips, and say that such a man loved her and desired to make her his wife? She felt that, in making such a declaration, it would be thought that she was uttering an incredible and monstrous falsehood—so humble was she of herself, with all her goodness and beauty, and so little aware of the power which they possessed, in their fair union, over any human heart. Her perplexity, therefore, was great—she knew not what to do—and wished that she could be carried away of a sudden out of the house, and disappear into some distant obscurity.

Several days passed over in this kind of distraction; and Margaret, afraid almost to meet the eyes of Miss Wedderburne and her mother, had a good excuse, in her great bodily weakness, for keeping almost entirely with her pupils, or in her own bedroom. Her lover behaved to her with the finest feelings, absenting himself much from the house, and manifestly restraining in his manner everything like the strong expression of a tender attachment. But poor Margaret trembled every time he came into the room; and, although her heart was entirely free from all passionate emotion towards him, yet she experienced what a strong power over the female heart there is in the idea of an exclusive preference—and she thought, with many lonely sighs, how happy indeed some woman, of equal rank

in life with himself, would one day be as his wife, when she and his transient love for her were both forgotten.

Richard Wedderburne perceived that an internal struggle was constantly agitating her, and he was in strong hopes that love would arise in his favour, powerful enough to shake her fortitude, and bring her at last to yield up her heart and her will to his sway. He knew her history, and that she could have no other attachment; and therefore he felt, without weak or vain presumption, that he would probably win her deepest and tenderest affections. Margaret had begun to hope that he saw everything in the same light that she did, and that he would soon get the better of so ill-placed a passion; but the heart of a strong-natured man will not, when touched at the core, so easily turn away from the object of its desire, nor sink before a dubious repulse. Accordingly, he soon contrived to find Margaret alone, and renewed his suit, at first with an overflow of the most winning and subduing kindness, and afterwards, when he beheld the orphan not unmoved, but resolute, with a desperate vehemence of passion, that overcame her at once with fear and pity, and, but for the power of her noble purpose, would also have overcome her with love.

"I beseech you to consider who I am, sir. Little more than a year ago, I was living a poor girl in a miserable lane, upon bread and water, or potatoes—coarsely clad—and lying down at night on a chaff-bed. My friends were people in the lowest ranks of life—and, God knows, I had no reason to think myself in any way their superiors. Your sister's instructions may have improved me since then; but think on what I am telling you, and you will be ashamed to love such a one as me. Think on me—an ordinary girl, in low life, going to the well for water, along with poor servant-girls, as I did every day—and you, Mr Wedderburne, will feel at once what a degradation it would be to love such a person."—"You slept on a chaff-bed—you say so, Margaret! God bless your fair bosom for ever! Listen to me—say that you will be my wife—and you shall be cherished for ever in a bed of down—and love will watch over you all your life long—and I will devote all my life to make you happy." To one so enthusiastic, in his deep and strong passion, as Richard Wedderburne, Margaret had touched upon topics that only served to render her more irresistibly dear; and proud as he was, he boldly looked all the circumstances she had alluded to in the face, and felt the utter feebleness of the distinctions of rank when brought to oppose or withstand the great power of nature. "Swear to marry me, Margaret, and let the time be as remote as you choose"—and, snatching up the Bible from the table, he seized her hand, and pressed it lovingly down upon the open pages. Margaret shuddered at the violence of the action and the words, and, firmly rescuing her hand from his grasp, said, with a deep low voice, "That she would take no oath—for to become his wife was impossible."

When Richard Wedderburne was at last forced to know that Margaret would not make the promise which he endeavoured, with all the power of his spirit, to extort from her when under her strong

emotion, he strove next to gain her acquiescence to a proposal which was virtually an equivalent. "If you will not say that you will become my wife, say that you will remain in our house, as you now are, on condition of my never again speaking to you on the subject." Affected deeply by his love and his entreaties, Margaret could not find in her heart to declare that she must leave the house for ever; and she now, by her silence, seemed, with the tears trickling down her cheeks, to say that it should be as he desired. Her melancholy smile expressed a wish that happiness and peace and tranquillity might not be destroyed by an incident that must be driven out of mind, and never again even alluded to by a single look. Her lover availed himself of the pause in her resolution, pressed her fervently to his bosom, and swearing never to speak to her again about love, left the room, with a face, however, evidently glowing with a soul-felt satisfaction, and almost with triumph.

Margaret was now plunged into utter misery. She soon saw clearly that she stood unintentionally pledged to her lover almost the same as if she had given him a promise. And did she not begin to feel how dear to her he was becoming, or at least soon might become, if once she delivered up her heart and imagination to the dawning beam of love? "Oh!" thought she to herself, "that such might be my destiny—that his mother and sister might be brought to think of me as his wife, and then, then indeed, might I be the happiest of all living creatures!" But a dead, heavy, icy weight of conviction, pressing upon her inmost heart, told her that such a thought was, indeed, the extreme of self-deluding folly; and that the rising emotions of nature within her soul were beginning to blind her to the fatal truth. For who was she—the orphan child of a miserable mechanic, who had died in want, sin, and shame—that now presumed to think of the time when her head might lie on the same pillow with that of Richard Wedderburne? All dim thoughts of such happiness soon passed away from her heart; and she knew that ere long she must face a very different life. Nor did that ultimate and unvarying conviction greatly distress, though it could not but depress her; for conscience, a sense of duty, moral feeling unwarped, and integrity subsisting entire in a humble and pure nature, all combined to enable her to make the sacrifice, if not with ease, at least without anguish; and when finally she implored, upon her knees, protection from God, wherever his Providence might conduct her, something remained within her soul, after all its dreadful conflicts, calm, clear, confident, and triumphant, that assured her she had been true and faithful to his Holy law. In that delightful feeling her heart was now proof against all the severest temptations nature could bring against her; and she even looked forward with a calm and deep satisfaction to whatever new and as yet unimagined trials might be yet awaiting her, an orphan, on the rougher and darker paths of life.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Inspired with such thoughts, Margaret Lyndsay, after a few days' further conflict, wrote a long letter to Miss Wedderburne, telling her all that had occurred, and offering to leave the house immediately, and to hide herself anywhere she would propose, till her brother had forgot such a person, and taken one worthy of him to be his wife. She heard Miss Wedderburne's voice in the drawing-room; so she went into her friend's own parlour, and laid the sealed letter down upon her writing-desk, in such a manner that it could not for a moment escape observation. This done, she felt perfect peace of mind, as far as she herself was concerned, and sat down in her own quiet bedroom, with wet eyes—but, as she thought, almost in some degree happy.

She had not remained there many minutes ruminating on her condition, when she heard the door of the drawing-room open and shut; and Miss Wedderburne and her mother came into her little apartment. Both their faces were grave, and, to Margaret's alarmed imagination, they also seemed clouded with upbraiding displeasure. The truth was, that the eye of a mother had, for some time past, discerned something unhappy and distracted in her son's mind, formerly so cheerful and elate; and combining one thing, however trifling, with another, she was convinced that an attachment, perhaps an avowed one, subsisted between him and Margaret Lyndsay. She had that very day questioned him about it; and he, having a soul above deception, told, with delicacy, nearly the whole truth. All he said was to the honour of Margaret; but the very idea of such a connection was so great a shock to that excellent but proud woman, that it was not in her power to prevent unkind and angry feelings from rising up towards the Orphan; and in an extreme selfishness, which appeared to her pure reason, and indisputable propriety, or even virtue, she would, in that state of mind, have allowed Margaret to die, rather than that her son should make her his wife, even if her death had been to destroy his happiness for ever.

Pale, speechless, and trembling, Margaret durst not lift her eyes from the floor; for she felt that the altered countenance of both her guardians were upon hers, and that she was in their sight a detected culprit. "I did not expect this from you, Margaret Lyndsay.—Sincere I always thought you—and I deserved sincerity at your hands.—Did I not?" Margaret gasped for utterance—but not one single word could escape her quivering lips. "I will not revile you with ingratitude, although it has been great.—You have been tempted, and have fallen.—So at least I call it, to cherish, and conceal, and encourage, under your circumstances, an attachment with the son of your benefactress.—You have sunk in my esteem.—Yet I cannot think you base—no—that I cannot do. Will you then agree to leave this house, and to go wherever I ask you to go, till the foolish passion of a boy has died away, which it soon will

do?" Margaret now felt sudden relief and sudden strength. "Yes, my honoured benefactress,—yes, I will leave the house this very night, with blessings implored from God upon one and all below its roof; and I am willing to go to a foreign land, if you choose it. Would —oh, would that I might go into my grave!" Mrs Wedderburne looked at her with a scrutinising gaze—but she saw nothing but the eager, impassioned, and weeping truth; and, as she tried to penetrate into her very inmost thoughts, Margaret dropped down upon her knees, and said—"Oh! pity me, pity me, if your son is unhappy, for I am not guilty, but innocent in this thing. Ask him, and he will speak the truth; for my young master has a noble soul, and his lips will never shape themselves to a falsehood. I am deeply sensible of my utter unworthiness. I never deceived you; but, since first he addressed me, I knew not what to do; and, when I strove to confess to Miss Wedderburne, my heart died within me. But put me to trial. Tell me where to go—show me the hovel or the cell wherein to conceal myself, and there will I joyfully lie down in dust and ashes, in rags and beggary. Almost from beggary, and from much sorrow, did you, my beloved Miss Wedderburne, rescue me; and to want and wretchedness will I now return, rather than cause any grief to those whom I love next to them who have gone to heaven."

Miss Wedderburne had hitherto sat silent. She now looked to her mother, and said, "Did not I know her truly—and is she not the same noble creature we always thought? But I should use other and better words. Margaret, you are wise and strong in all true knowledge—and from you I, at least, have much to learn. Be comforted: we must part for a while, but all may be for the best; and although I must never call you sister, yet you are so in my heart, as I hope I shall always be in yours. Look cheerful, Margaret; and, mother, you surely will not frown upon her any more?" Margaret smiled, and said, with an unfaltering voice, "Since I am not despised or condemned as one that is guilty, I am perfectly happy, and hope to retrieve any error I have fallen into, by adhering steadily to any line of conduct Mrs Wedderburne will point out."

All displeasure, confusion, and fear were now at an end; and perhaps Mrs Wedderburne, kind-hearted, humane, and pious as she was, felt something stronger than regret, almost remorse itself, when she saw the innocent orphan drying up all her tears, and heard her calling down the blessing of God upon her head, wholly forgetful of the unjust and injurious harshness to which, in her helplessness, she had now been subjected. Then, too, Margaret, who had been too much stunned with the unexpected severity and acrimony of Mrs Wedderburne's reproof, to be able to mention the letter she had written, and who had, indeed, almost forgotten it, respectfully whispered to Miss Wedderburne that she would find it in her parlour. When it was read aloud to her mother, Margaret's vindication was complete, and the orphan shone before them more lovely than she had ever done before, in the pale beauty of her sorely tried and unfailing virtue. No wonder, thought Miss Wedderburne, that my

brother loves such a being; but with the mother, the satisfaction, perhaps justifiable, but certainly too selfish, that her son was to be saved from an unequal marriage, prevented some of those kindly emotions towards the poor girl, which in different circumstances of trial would have arisen in her truly virtuous and enlightened mind.

The good old lady had now regained her composure and peace of mind, and began to feel more pity for the orphan. "You must forget Richard altogether, Margaret, and there is no fear but you will do so by-and-by. Let not this passion prey upon your heart to your unhappiness."—"Never, never, madam, will I forget your son while I live. I esteem, I honour him; and as for the love he bears to me all unworthy, may it soon be changed into that friendship which I hope I may deserve. No passion preys on my heart. I would look with perfect joy on him and his wife walking together into this room this very hour. I do not forget who and what I am. I do not love your son—believe me that I do not; for, had I done so, I must have forgotten all my past life—my present duties, and thought not at all on the uncertain future that may be awaiting me;—my conscience tells me I have had far other thoughts, and I will leave this house in peace of mind, but oh, sure enough! with a sad and a heavy heart, for never were there such friends as I have had. God bless you all for ever and ever!" Miss Wedderburne wept upon her bosom; and the old lady herself was greatly affected. "Where must I go?" No one answered; and Margaret continued, "If no plan occurs to you, madam, I will mention one—for I have for a fortnight past been thinking of little else. I have—at least I had two or three years ago—a grand-uncle living near the head of Clydesdale, in the parish where both my father and mother were born. No intercourse that ever I remember took place between him and them; but, if he is still alive, perhaps he will receive me into his house—if not, others may. The clergyman who married my parents is also alive; and my grandfather was a surgeon, well known and respected over all that part of the country;—there must be some who will show kindness to me on his account, and also on my grandmother's. During the life of my parents, I never thought of anybody they did not think of—and I believe they were not on friendly terms with those I allude to; but, notwithstanding, I have no fears. I will go there, and find a dwelling somewhere among honest people. I will work for my bread, as I have often done; and with letters from you in favour of my character, none will doubt that I am respectable. I am willing to go to-morrow—I will go on foot—your son will never come to know where I am till there is no longer need of concealment—and there I may perhaps find a place to live happily all my days!"

Margaret spoke with simplicity and fervour; and, whether her plan was judicious and reasonable or not, it at least seemed to be so to Mrs Wedderburne. Her son was now on a visit for a few days to a friend in Berwickshire, having gone away purposely till Margaret should recover her tranquillity, and believing that she was in reality engaged to him for life. It was therefore fixed that Margaret Lyndsay should, before his return, set out on her pilgrimage.

CHAPTER XXIX.

At sunrise, on a still midsummer morning, Margaret Lyndsay left the house in which she had so long been happy; and as she gently shut the door behind her, she felt excluded from that kind and gracious guardianship of her forlorn and orphan estate. But no faults of her own had caused the loss; and her departure was not in anger but in sorrow. Although forced to leave their roof, it was not in disgrace and desertion; and, much as she had been before beloved and esteemed by her protectors, her character now appeared to them both in all its native nobleness and purity, and they resolved to reward her willing sacrifice by a lifelong friendship. Prudence, propriety, and perhaps pride, made it necessary, for the present, that Margaret should become a seeming outcast, and a wanderer on an uncertain pilgrimage. But more than good wishes went with her; for her friends made her perfectly independent of all charity; and she knew to whom to apply for advice and succour in any difficulties that might be met with on this adventurous commencement of a new life. Therefore the young pilgrim, although sad, was neither downcast nor dismayed; the few tears that trickled down her cheeks did not impair the cheerful expression of her beauty; she had dressed herself with her usual neatness and graceful simplicity, as if going only to take a walk with the children she so dearly loved; but she was herself the orphan child of poor and humble parents, so she had taken her small bundle in her hand, and giving the last hurried look to the windows of the room where Harriet and Frances were sleeping, she cheered up her own heart, and began her journey along the beautiful elm-walk of the Meadows, now hushed and fragrant and fresh in the dewy dawn. The birds were rejoicing in a low thick warble, and she, too, rejoiced; for hers was the strength of a soul void of offence to God and man, and happiness came suddenly upon her, and drove out all anxiety and sorrow from her fairest bosom.

On reaching the end of the Walk, to her glad surprise, Miss Wedderburne stood before her with a smile, and said—"I must see you safe at least half of your journey, my dear Margaret. Be happy!" But she saw the beaming face of the innocent creature, and felt that she needed no encouragement. A chaise was standing near—they went into it—and, in a few minutes, Edinburgh and all its suburbs were left out of sight.

Margaret, elated by the thoughtful affection of her friend, enjoyed the journey almost as much as if they had been wheeling away to some delightful residence in the country, where all was prepared for them, smiling faces, welcoming hands, and pleasant occupation. It was a strong, bright, bold sunshine, able to make barrenness beautiful, and all the common weeds by the wayside splendid as garden flowers. Miles were but minutes to the glad orphan; and the hour came too soon, when, at a small wayside inn, about sixteen miles from Edinburgh, the chaise stopped, and she had to part with her protectress. "I will not detain you, Margaret. I shall be back to

George Square by ten o'clock. Go your ways, my dear friend, and God be with you. You will remember all that myself and my mother have said." They kissed each other—Margaret with a humble and grateful heart; a few tears were soon dried up. and the fearless girl pursued her solitary way along a wide moor.

It was one of the perfect days of July, when Nature is felt to be within the very heart of the year, and when there seems never to have been such a thing as winter or decay. The blue heavens were steadfast with their marbled clouds, and all the fair and gorgeous array of perishable vapours seemed then as if they were everlasting. A general murmur of bliss prevailed, and it accompanied the solitary girl, as she walked along the houseless moor. Every moment there was something that delighted her—the green lizard, as it glided through the rustling tall grass by the wayside—the lapwing, now less wily that its young were fledged, walking along the lea-fields with its graceful crest—the large yellow-circled ground-bees, booming by in their joyful industry—the dragon-fly, with his shivering wings, shooting in eccentric flight, almost like a bird of prey—the bleating of lambs on the sunny knowes—or the deep cooing of the cushat-dove, somewhere afar off in his lonesome wood.

"Will you remember a puir auld lame blind sailor? By your footsteps I think you are a woman, and a young ane." Looking up, Margaret saw a greyheaded man, with his hat in his hand, led by a little dog in a string. The thought of her brother and of sweet Harry Needham suddenly smote her heart. This was the end of a sea-life. "Yes, my poor old man, here is a shilling for you. Is that enough?" "God reward you, my bonny bairn. It will make me happy for several days. Ay—ay; God will reward you, sure enough. I'se warrant ye're a leddy taking a bit walk this fine warm morning. Perhaps my doggie will lead me up the avenue, and I may fin' my way down to the kitchen, and get a drink o' beer. Ye see there's nae satisfying beggar bodies. But water's unco wersh, and doesna sloken weel, it's sae het a' through this month;"—and so saying, the old lame, broken-down, blind beggar laughed till his furrowed face was bright. "I am no leddy, my honest friend; but there's another sixpence, and it will buy you a good draught of beer, and a bit cheese and bread likewise." "Nae leddy, say you? I wush that I could just see for a single minute, to ken if ye're no cheating me. Wad you like to hear a sang?" Margaret said she had not time to wait; and the old man, making a bow, wished her a good husband, Pompey tugged at his string, and away hobbled the veteran on his wooden limb, singing like a tiger,

> "'Twas in the good ship Rover
> I sail'd the world around,
> And for three years and over
> I ne'er touch'd British ground."

Margaret felt, as she looked behind, and saw the old sailor waving his hat in farewell, that happiness was a strange thing in this life.—Why was she herself so happy? Father—mother—sisters—all dead

—dead, too, Harry Needham—her brother, perhaps, never more to return—herself forced to leave her home—and going, she knew not well whither, perhaps to meet rebuff and rebuke, and to be sent out of the door like an unauthorised intruder or an impostor. She knew all this—and, sitting down for a little while on the low turf-wall of a little enclosure in the moor, she tried to persuade herself that it was heartless to be happy, and that she ought to be sad and sorrowful in memory of the beloved dead. But conscience whispered away all such idle misgivings, and guarded her pure spiritual happiness. Not even could the remembrance of all the funerals she had seen prepared, one by one, within little more than a single year, distress her innocent soul. Her Bible, too, was in the bundle she carried in her hand. There, in the silence of that sweet solitary spot, she took it out, and read two or three chapters of the New Testament. As she again shut the clasps, and lifted up her eyes, how soothingly beautiful the green knolls, with their little groups of lambs asleep or in play! And as she looked to heaven, how steeped in mercy seemed the blue depths of the wide smiling sky! She rose with an expanding heart, and walked on along the dreary dusty road as if it had been the soft margin of a murmuring rivulet. "My uncle must be glad to see me—no fear of that. Blood, as the good old homely proverb says, is warmer than water; and I will love him, be he what he may."

The highways are trodden by a perpetual pilgrimage. Margaret overtook an elderly woman, who walked feebly, but at the same time with that quiet air of resolution that shows a deep purpose in the heart. They greeted each other; and that which was alone in the thoughts of the aged traveller soon came to utterance. "I'm gaun to see my son Thomas, who has met wi' a sair accident in blasting a rock wi' gunpouther. They're feared he'll lose his sight, and he's a' shattered baith in body and in limb. He's maybe dead, now that I'm telling you about him. If sae, it's a decree—and we maun a' submit." Margaret told something, too, of her story; and in about half an hour they came to the cottage by the roadside where the wounded man was lying. "I'm frighted to gang in, lest Thomas be dead," said the mother; "I'm getting sick." Margaret took her kindly by the arm, and went with her into the house, where she had the satisfaction to see a mother and a wife both perfectly happy. The poor man was in a fair way of recovery, and, although his face was scorched, his eyesight was not impaired. "Wull you stay and tak your dinner wi' us, ma'am," said the gudewife, "gin ye can pit up wi' siclike as we hae? for, although you be on your feet, wi' a bundle aneth your arm, I'm sare mista'en gin you're no a leddy when you're at hame. I'm sure your father's at the least a minister."—This was twice Margaret had been taken for a "leddy" during her humble journey; and no wonder, for steps of more natural grace had never touched a Persian carpet on the floor of a rich man's house, nor had pearls ever adorned a brighter confusion of auburn hair, nor jewels ever sparkled above a forehead of purer snow. She took a drink of milk and a bit of oatmeal cake with a smiling face,

and wishing quick and complete recovery to the gudeman, left the hut among many kind words, and pursued her journey.

She had passed, almost without observing it, the solitary village of Carnwath—the cool placid afternoon was now pretty far advanced, and the scenery was every minute becoming more beautiful. A new country was gradually opening upon her, and cultivation, wherever the ground admitted of it, was either complete or extending. Thick hedgerows, with here and there a tall tree, groves, a gentleman's seat, farmhouses, with comfortable corn-stacks, made a pleasant contrast to the dull tracts Margaret Lindsay had passed through; and she began to think that her uncle's dwelling must be a sweet one, if it were anywhere near the banks of the bonny burn that now came wimpling by, and conducted her through rich holms and meadows. "Come here, my lassie," cried a cheerful voice, "and gie us a' the news frae the East." A loud laugh succeeded; and Margaret saw, below the shadow of a huge plane-tree, a party of haymakers, who were enjoying themselves after their day's work. They were only a few yards off the road; and she cheerfully entered the gate, and stood beside the party.

All noisy mirth ceased in a moment before the smile of the beautiful stranger. "Nae offence, ma'am, I hope," said the same voice that called to her passing by;—"we're a' heartsome, but dinna want to be unceevil.—Will you sit down and rest you?" Margaret, remembering hay-time at Braehead, when she used, half in work, half in pastime, to join the merry band of rakers, sat down cheerfully on one of the wreathed roots of the old overshading tree, and, taking the proffered milk-bowl into her hand, drank to all their healths with a sweet smile that made them at once her friends. Several maidens like herself were resting on the grass—children—young men—and a patriarchal figure, with a head as white as snow. The weariness of a hot day's work was on the reclining group, enlivened by the pleasant feeling that the sweet-smelling meadow-hay was all put into little ricks, safe against change of weather, and that the following morn was Sabbath. The mirth and jests of the sunny working hours were almost over, and the hearts of the labourers were beginning to turn towards home, and their lowly beds. At such a time, the spirit of a thoughtful humanity was easily awakened; and the old man respectfully and kindly said to Margaret,—"You are a stranger, I think, in these parts. The sun is fast westering. Have you far to go?"—"I am going to Daniel Craig's, at Nether-Place. How far am I from it?" The old man told her, "That Nether-Place was distant about three miles—and that she had only to follow the burn. Ye'll come first to an auld tower, syne a bare-looking house with a bit bourtree-bush; and then, about a mile ayont, is Nether-Place, a' covered wi' trees, where you'll hear the sound of craws, for the branches are black wi' their nests. But, do you ken Daniel Craig?—Excuse me for asking; but he's an auld man like mysel', and doesna see very many company."—"My mother was his niece, and I am going, for the first time in my life, to pay him a visit." The old man rose up from the grass, and going up to

Margaret, took her by the hand, and affectionately said, "Your name will be Lyndsay? Ay, ay, you're Alice Craig's ain bairn. God bless you, my bonnie lassie! Out o' sight, out o' mind, is a sad but a true saying in this world. Are your parents living or dead?"—"They are both dead—I am thus far on my way to see if my grand-uncle will acknowledge me."—"If he disna, I will," said the old man. "I was at the funerals baith o' Gilbert Craig and Adam Lyndsay—your grandfathers—about twenty years syne—and I ken the family-face weel; but not a single ane among a' the Craigs, or Lyndsays either, had ever so bonny a countenance as thy ain—and there's mony a ane in the parish will think the same. Daniel Craig is no a bad man—na, na—but he's a kind o' miser; however, I manna wrang him—he'll no shut the door against you; there's no ane in the three parishes roun' that wudna open it to siccan a ane coming at the gloamin', and asking a lodging for the night." Margaret's heart was glad when she found herself unexpectedly in the midst of friends; and she willingly promised to pay a visit to the Haugh in a day or two, the name of the farm where her new-found friend lived, and whose low thatched roof she saw about a quarter of a mile off up the burn, on the side of a brae that bounded the beautiful little prospect. "We'll likely see you, Miss Lyndsay, at the kirk the morn. Ay, weel I ken the pew where your mother sat, and a' her folk, for many lang years."—"Call me Margaret Lyndsay when next we meet, for I like that name best, and it is most fitting for me. Good-night, and God be with you all." They all stood up, and uttered kind words at her departure.

"Her heart rejoiced in Nature's joy,"

as in the dewy stillness of evening she felt carried on along the soft green banks of the burn, by the pleasant continuance of the liquid murmur. The pure breath of the air coming down the vale met her face with a refreshing coolness, and the velvet herbage gave new elasticity to her wearied feet, that felt a sweet relief from the sultry dustiness of the hard highway. She soon passed by the little solitary tower or keep, and then the hut with its bourtree-bush. It seemed as if she had not walked above a few miles all the day long, and she cared not if Nether-Place were much more remote, and not to be reached before the set of sun. "About this time will my sweet Harriet and Frances be preparing for their beds, and I hope—yes, well I know—that at their prayers they will be sorry that they have lost Margaret Lyndsay." At that thought her eyes filled with tears; but now she heard, in the wide stillness of deepening twilight, the faint sound of the rookery composing itself to rest, and in a few minutes was at Nether-Place.

With a beating heart she stopped a little while at the mouth of the avenue, or lane, that seemed to lead up to the house. It was much overgrown with grass, and there were but few marks of wheels; the hedges on each side were thick and green, but unclipped, and with frequent gaps; something melancholy lay over all about; and the place had the air of being uninhabited. But still it was beauti-

ful, for it was bathed in the dews of a rich midsummer gloaming, and the clover filled the air with fragrance that revived the heart of the solitary orphan, as she stood, for a few minutes, irresolute, and apprehensive of an unkind reception.

At last she found heart, and the door of the house being open, Margaret walked in, and stood on the floor of the wide low-roofed kitchen. An old man was sitting, as if half asleep, in a high-backed arm-chair, by the side of the chimney. Before she had time or courage to speak, her shadow fell upon his eyes, and he looked towards her with strong visible surprise, and, as she thought, with slight displeasure. "Ye hae got off your road, I'm thinking, young woman; what seek you here?" Margaret asked respectfully if she might sit down. "Ay, ay, ye may sit down, but we keep nae refreshment here—this is no a public-house. There's ane a mile west in the clachan." The old man kept looking upon her, and with a countenance somewhat relaxed from its inhospitable austerity. Her appearance did not work as a charm or a spell, for she was no enchantress in a fairy tale; but the tone of her voice, so sweet and gentle, the serenity of her face, and the meekness of her manner, as she took her seat upon a stool not far from the door, had an effect upon old Daniel Craig, and he bade her come forward and take a chair "farther ben the house."

"I am an orphan, and have perhaps but little claim upon you; but I have ventured to come here—my name is Margaret Lyndsay, and my mother's name was Alice Craig." The old man moved upon his chair as if a blow had struck him, and looked long and earnestly into her face. Her features confirmed her words. Her countenance possessed that strong power over him that goes down mysteriously through the generations of perishable man, connecting love with likeness; so that the child in its cradle may be smiling almost with the selfsame expression that belonged to some one of its forefathers mouldered into ashes many hundred years ago. "Nae doubt, nae doubt, ye are the daughter o' Walter Lyndsay and Alice Craig. Never were twa faces mair unlike than theirs, yet yours is like them baith. Margaret—that is your name—I give you my blessing. Hae you walked far? Mysie's doun at the Rashy-riggs wi' milk to the calf, but will be in belyve. Come, my bonny bairn, take a shake o' your uncle's hand."

Margaret told, in a few words, the principal events of the last three years as far as she could; and the old man, to whom they had been almost all unknown, heard her story with attention, but said little or nothing. Meanwhile Mysie came in—an elderly, hard-featured woman, but with an expression of homely kindness that made her dark face not unpleasant. She was the only servant, and, after the first surprise, did quietly what she was bid, and set out the evening meal. While Daniel Craig closed his eyes, and lifted up his hands to bless it, Margaret could not but think the greyheaded man, in spite of the character she had casually heard of him, must have a heart that might incline towards her, and she partook cheerfully of what was set before her, and with a good appetite after her long journey. When

supper was over, Daniel told the servant, who had ate at the same board, to get ready the bed for the young woman—" for my niece, Margaret Lyndsay." Mysie held up her hands with pleasure. " The dochter o' Elspy Craig, as I am a sinner! Fair fa' your bonny face—I'll mak the bed soft and sweet, if feathers and thyme sprigs will do't," and forthwith set about her business.

Margaret felt herself an inmate of her uncle's house, and her heart began already to warm towards the old greyheaded solitary man. His manner exhibited, as she thought, a mixture of curiosity and kindness; but she did not disturb his taciturnity, and only returned immediate and satisfactory answers to his few short and abrupt questions. He evidently was thinking over the particulars which she had given him of her life at Braehead, and in the lane; and she did not allow herself to fear but that, in a day or two, if he permitted her to stay, she would be able to awaken in his heart a natural interest in her behalf. Hope was a guest that never left her bosom; and she rejoiced when, on the return of the old domestic from the bedroom, her uncle requested her to read aloud a chapter of the Bible. She did so—and the old man took the book out of her hand with evident satisfaction, and, fastening the clasp, laid it by in the little cupboard in the wall near his chair, and wished her good-night.

Mysie conducted her into the bedroom, where everything was neat, and superior, indeed, to the ordinary accommodation of a farmhouse. " Ye needna fear, for feather-bed and sheets are a' as dry as last year's hay in the stack. I keep a' things in the house weel aired, for damp's a great disaster. But, for a' that, sleepin' breath hasna been drawn in that bed these saxteen year!" Margaret thanked her for the trouble she had taken, and soon laid down her limbs in grateful rest. A thin calico curtain was before the low window; but the still radiance of a midsummer night glimmered on the floor. All was silent—and in a few minutes Margaret Lyndsay was asleep.

CHAPTER XXX.

The strong light of the rejoicing sun awoke Margaret from deep and dreamless sleep, and she heard a footstep now and then moving along the earthen floor of the kitchen, in the few necessary occupations of a Sabbath morning. She did not wait to be aroused—but soon left her bedroom, and walked out among the dews, now melting away on the ground and trees. She saw that Nether-Place was indeed a pleasant dwelling; and many of the tender and happy remembrances, which her heart still cherished, faithfully and sacredly, of sweet Braehead, now came upon her, as she looked up to the gorgeous grove of sycamores that shadowed and sheltered the house. To her surprise and delight, she beheld the smooth waters of the very burn she had walked along the evening before, gliding by within a hundred yards

—for they had taken a sudden turn on meeting a line of low hillocks, and enclosed the farmhouse in a kind of small, green, and wooded peninsula. A bridge was seen beyond a large meadow-field; and, about a mile off, Margaret observed a spire, that arose from among a cluster of houses on a hill-side. That she rightly conjectured to be the parish church and village of Casterton. A soft undulating line of green summits went along the horizon in their pastoral beauty; and altogether, near and far, Margaret had never, in her small experience, beheld any scene so placid, so cheerful, and so seeming to be, in itself, a little secluded world. "Here," thought she, "may I live, if my uncle will permit me, away from the knowledge of all my friends in Edinburgh—and here can I give disturbance to none of their minds." All was still, except the rookery in the old elm-trees, that stood but the distance of a broomy field from the house; and that monotonous sound, to which the ear soon becomes accustomed, served but to deepen the silence of the Sabbath.

The old man seemed pleased to see that Margaret was an early riser, and spoke to her very kindly at their homely breakfast. His face, as well as that of his domestic, both wore a graver expression than on the evening before; and, in an hour or two, all three were ready to walk to church. They proceeded almost silently by a narrow footpath, through meadow, lea, hayfield, ploughland, coppice, and grove—and soon reached the place of worship. The congregation began to collect in the churchyard—some standing in little groups, and others sitting down in the sunshine, upon the gravestones or the old mossy wall. The bell tinkled clear in the dry atmosphere, and its sound brought together, in quickening motion, people appearing over the braes, and rising up from the hollows. A quiet animation prevailed — the salutations of courtesy partook of the spirit of religion; and the composed faces and voices of all spoke of that common sentiment by which we feel ourselves to be united, as brethren of mankind.

Sitting in that little kirk, surrounded on all sides with decent people in the humbler ranks of life, and here and there, in larger and more neatly furnished seats, with the families of the few neighbouring gentry, Margaret Lyndsay felt herself in a new situation of the deepest and most sacred interest; and, without any feeling of idle curiosity, she could not but look, with a calm delight, during divine service, over the quiet and attentive congregation. In this very place had sat her humble forefathers; and the sainted spirit of her mother might be looking down upon her, who was now brought by the changes of mortal life to the spot of her own nativity. With a grateful spirit she joined in the "voice of psalms, the simple song of praise;" and, before service closed, felt herself to belong to the same parish with those whom she had joined so fervently in the worship of their Creator. Nor was she unobserved by the congregation—a new face, and one so beautiful, by the side of old Daniel Craig! Many wondered who she was; and perhaps a few, one or two elderly persons who chanced to look for a while on the features of the stranger, felt her resemblance to some face or other nearly

forgotten, and knew her to be a blood relation to the old man by whose side she sat. On dismissal of the congregation, there was some whispering about the pretty maiden in Daniel's pew; and old Thomas Carstairs of the Haugh, who had spoken with her on the hay-field, had a secret to communicate, and soon spread from seat to seat the rumour that she was the grand-daughter, from Edinburgh, of a man whose name was yet kindly remembered in the parish—Adam Lyndsay. A few of the friends of that good and useful man went up to her in the churchyard, and introduced themselves to her, welcoming her to the parish, and hoping to see her with her uncle at their houses when it might be convenient. Margaret rejoiced to find herself quite among friends—a deep gratitude to the Giver of all good took possession of her; and, on returning to Nether-Place, it had all the appearance of being her home. Nothing, to be sure, could be more different than it was from the house she had left only a single day ago; but then it resembled Brachead, and the glad soul of her very childhood awoke within her as she sat down on the old wooden chairs, and eyed the humble hearth. She had no repinings; but then she thought with tenderest gratitude on her benefactors, and blessed them in their own elegant mansion, and brought them before her affectionate heart in every hour of their separate employments. She felt assured, too, that they were thinking of her; and hoped that one, who had unfortunately thought of her too much, might soon bring his mind to regard her only as a person worthy of his esteem, and who had sought to deserve it by voluntarily relinquishing, for his sake, the home where she had so long been happy.

In the quiet of evening the old man took her with him along the burn-side, and into a green ewe-bught, where they sat down for a while in silence. "Margaret Lyndsay, your mother did not use me well. I was her uncle—and yet, on her father's death, she never asked any kindness of me—and she married without ever telling me of it. It is true that her father and I were not living as brithers should; but whose fault was that?—as much his as mine. Don't greet, my bairn; these are auld stories, but I remember them as gin it was but yesterday." Margaret was weeping in a strange dream of her mother's life before she herself had been born. She remembered her mother's words about her uncle, and it seemed now as if some wrong were done to the dead. "I tell you not to greet, Margaret; your mother was a harmless creature; ay, she had a fine nature o' her ain; and I trust that God has taken her to His mercy. But why did neither she nor her husband ever keep up ony acquaintance wi' me? They never wrote me ae single word even when a child was born to them, for they thought I was a man without a human heart; but they were sair mistaken—and I will prove that they were, by being kind to their orphan bairn." These words alluded to things of which Margaret, in the ignorance and simplicity of her childhood, had known nothing; but the tremulous voice and grey head of the old man, as he sat uncovered by her side in that quiet and lonely place, touched her heart with extreme tenderness to him, and she expressed her gratitude in a few words that went to her uncle's

heart. "I have nae wife—nae children—nae friends, I may say, Margaret—nane that cares for me, but the servant in the house, an auld friendless body like mysel; but if you choose to bide wi' us, you are mair than welcome, for I know not what is in that face o' thine; but this is the pleasantest day that has come to me these last thirty years."

Margaret was now requested to tell her uncle more about her parents and herself, and she complied with a full heart. She went back, with all the power of nature's eloquence, to the history of her young years at Brachead—recounted all her father's miseries—her mother's sorrow—and her own trials. All the while she spoke the tears were streaming from her eyes, and her sweet bosom heaved with a crowd of heavy sighs. The old man sat silent; but more than once he sobbed, and passed his withered toil-worn hands across his forehead. "I was not to blame, Margaret. How was I to blame for not assisting you all in your poverty? I knew it not. Walter Lyndsay, your father, was a proud man. Not proud was your mother, Alice Craig; but a woman obeys her husband, nae doubt; and therefore she lived and died in poverty, rather than tell her distress to her father's brither. How then was I to blame?"—"My dear uncle, we wanted nothing. Our afflictions were from God—from disease and frequent deaths. But we were all happy—all, except my beloved father, and he died at last with a smile upon his face; for I kissed him the very moment he died, and he looked as if he felt that God had forgiven him. With them all now is peace. For myself, you have promised to allow me to remain at Nether-Place; and I will work for my maintenance, for I never have been idle, and I can support myself."

They rose up together, as by mutual consent, and returned to the house. Before the light had too far died away, Daniel Craig asked Margaret to read a chapter in the Bible, as she had done the night before; and when she had concluded, he said, "I never heard the Scriptures so well read in all my days—did you, Mysie?" The quiet creature looked on Margaret with a smile of kindness and admiration, and said, that "she had never understood that chapter sae weel before, although, aiblins, she had read it a hundred times."—"Ye can gang to your bed without Mysie to show you the way to-night, my good niece—ye are one of the family now—and Nether-Place will after this be as cheerfu' a house as in a' the parish. But perhaps you'll tire o' us, Margaret, and wish yourself back at the town again, with these fine rich people." Margaret, seeing the old man in a happy mood, did not even vindicate her friends in Edinburgh from being only "fine rich people," but bade him good-night with a gentle familiarity; and again, upon her knees, returned thanks to God in her small bedroom, lighted only by the full risen moon, for having given her such a place of rest in her troubles.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Daniel Craig, the laird of Nether-Place, had for many years borne, in his native parish, one of the most repulsive of all characters, that of a miser; and as we judge of our fellow-creatures almost entirely by their life and conduct, no doubt the old man could not complain of being so esteemed. He was, indeed, a miser; but not one whose heart and soul lay with his hoard alone, in selfish and solitary passion, contented with the fever by which it was agitated and devoured. Too true it was that the beggar often went unrelieved from his door, and that he beheld frequent want and distress among his neighbours around, which he cared not to mitigate. Yet it was seldom that extreme old age, or blindness, or decrepitude, or a wandering mother with a flock of starving children, in vain appealed to his heart. Gruffly and capriciously he gave his alms, and always as if he parted painfully with his own; so that often the very objects of his charity, with his coin in their palm, could with difficulty return a blessing, and in the next house joined the sneer against Daniel Craig the miser. He was in all things scrupulously just, and his word was as good as his bond; so that, living as he did among poor people, to whose comfort and happiness regularity in payments is of such vital importance, and who, if they get justice, will rarely need generosity, his character at times was regarded with respect, and whenever it happened to be the subject of conversation after the ordinary spleen and spite had been vented against the close-fisted miser, something favourable always wound up the discourse, and it was admitted that the old man had his good qualities, notwithstanding all his avarice.

There were a good many farmers in the parish who better knew Daniel's character, and the events by which it had been produced. A few of them felt much friendship and regard for him, not unmixed with tenderness and pity. He had been cruelly disappointed, after he had rather passed the prime of manhood, in the strongest passion of the human heart; and had seen the woman who had promised to be his wife married almost to his next-door neighbour. A sullen and brooding spirit then settled over his whole character; he secluded himself from life; and he who had formerly been a man of cheerful and social habits, now spoke to no one but upon business, and seldom left the boundaries of his farm. He assumed the dress and appearance of an ordinary labourer, and worked in his fields, like a slave of the soil, from earliest to latest twilight. Years passed by, and the children of the woman who had deceived him grew up almost around his feet. To them Daniel was always kind when they chanced to come bird-nesting along his hedges, or to take a short cut to school through his farm. But in general he appeared to be what he was, a misanthrope, and in process of time he became also, no doubt, a miser.

For a long time it had been generally thought over the parish, that Daniel Craig would at last bequeath all his money to the family

of the woman who had so grievously injured him; but they all dropped away, one by one, in those natural diseases that insensibly change the countenances in the little country kirk, and vary the look of the very smallest congregation during every season of the year. So he lived apart in his hard-working retirement; as time went on, there were fewer and fewer who knew anything of his history; the circumstances which made him and his situation interesting ceased to be remembered; and he sustained the ignominy of a character which was alien to his original nature, although induced upon it by the operation of other strong disappointed passions, which in him had been ardent and strong. Thus, having lived sparingly—abstemiously—niggardly, for nearly thirty years, and having, during all that time, watered the furrows of his farm with the sweat of his brow, Daniel Craig was now rich, and had become the laird of this little property, about a hundred and twenty acres of arable and meadow land, on which he had been born the tenant's youngest son.

Such was the man in whose house Margaret Lyndsay had become an inmate. He felt that he had one foot in the grave, for he was upwards of threescore and ten; and all the strong affections of his nature, that had so long lain dormant, or yearned in solitary hopelessness towards beings long mouldered away into the dust, now rose up, not passionately and disturbedly, but with slow and steady and delightful movements, towards the beautiful orphan, who seemed to have been sent by Heaven, like an angel, to comfort his latter days. Had he not also shut up his heart against her mild and innocent mother? But the old man wore not his heart away now with fruitless regret or remorse. Margaret became to him even as his own daughter; and he called her by that name, with a tenderness that surprised his own heart, in which he had not supposed such a capacity of love had yet remained inextinct. Margaret looked on the old, greyheaded, solitary man, with that pitiful affection which she was always ready to bestow on any one of God's creatures who seemed to require it; but here, too, there were many qualities of character daily revealed to her, in themselves most estimable; they two were also of the same blood; and sweetly blended with all those feelings, profoundest gratitude in the orphan's heart, when she saw the roof of his house over her, a table spread and a bed prepared for her by one who bore the name of miser, but who, in a few days, looked upon her as the greatest treasure he now possessed.

The heart of the old man, that had for many years been locked up almost in a frost, now thawed, and dissolved under the gracious warmth of affection. Had he striven to do so, he could not have resisted the power of Margaret's perpetual smiles; but, instead of that, he was never happy when she was out of the room. He had found suddenly, when no such hope could have been even dreamt of in sleep, a new object of natural delight to cheer his declining age. More beautiful was Margaret Lyndsay—more tender—more cheerfully sedate—more sincerely loving than even she had ever been, who had left his bosom in her falsehood, and carried over her faith to another husband. Age had stilled all that passion—age and the

grave. But every man has within him the feelings of a father; and here was a daughter rising up before him in his old age—a flower seen, for the first time, in its perfect beauty; and, as he prayed devoutly to God, long to bloom unfading, when his grey hairs were still in the airless cell of death. This strong natural delight visiting him at last changed his whole character, or rather restored and revived it; so that, in a month or two, Daniel Craig was seen in neighbours' houses, on market-days, and even at a fair, with a countenance almost as much enlivened with happiness as any other in the merry village.

It was not long before Margaret Lyndsay was known, loved, and admired over the little parish. Remembrances of her parents—and also of her grandfather and grandmother, Mr and Mrs Adam Lyndsay—lingered in many houses, and made her at once a friend by their ingles. The novelty, too, and wonder of a niece of whom no one had known anything, coming unexpectedly to the house of Daniel Craig in his old age, and manifestly working such a change upon him, made quite a stir all around, which soon subsided into a general sentiment of regard with every one who had opportunities of seeing her beauty, sweetness, and worth. "Nae doubt," thought many, "he'll make her heir to everything—nane better entitled—for nane leevin's sae sib to him. And Daniel Craig canna be worth less than thousands." This last consideration disposed the hearts of many to admire and respect her, who might otherwise have been slow to think much of anything beyond their own firesides; and, without being the least aware of it, Margaret, who felt herself still a poor orphan, was now looked upon, over all the parish, as a rich heiress.

Daniel Craig had, within the few last years, let all his property of Nether-Place on a short lease, except a dozen acres. He needed rest in his old age—for few had worked so hard as he till so near the natural period of human life. Indolence had succeeded activity—and he had been in the custom of sitting the greatest part of the day in his arm-chair, taking a walk down to the burn-side, or, in the evening, to the end of his avenue that joined the high-road, to look, with an aimless curiosity, but faint human interest, on the unknown and nameless travellers passing by on the business of life. Everything immediately about Nether-Place was therefore neglected, and left to the silent processes of nature. The spot enclosed for a garden, and which once had been a very beautiful one, was quite overgrown with grass, that wrapped and smothered the gooseberry and currant bushes, and reached up to the lower branches of the fruit-trees, which, all unpruned as they were, still continued to brighten, with their purple or golden load, every autumn. The sundial now told only a few of the hours—for many branches had stretched over the smooth grass-plat on which it had been placed, and intercepted both light and shade from the moss-grown horologe.

Margaret Lyndsay ventured to propose that the weeds should be killed in the garden—that the rose-bushes, that looked with a thousand bright and dewy eyes all over the solitary enclosure, should

be laid open to the sun and the air. "As for the honeysuckles, they always take care of themselves, and clamber up to the light. My dear uncle, let us employ a man for a single day, and there will be a beautiful garden in the evening sun." A man was hired accordingly. Old Daniel took off his coat, and showed that he could handle a spade still; and Margaret and old Mysie lent their aid, with hoe and rake, on the scarce visible walks, that had once been gravelled, and that soon began again to appear in straight lines or circles, marking out where flower-beds and borders had flourished and faded in the springs and autumns of old. The good work once begun, proceeded prosperously; and in a few weeks Nether-Place was as sweet and pretty as the honeymoon cottage of a young wedded pair, who desire in their love to be surrounded with beauty.

The cheerful, because busy, time of harvest was now at hand; and the fields, brown and yellow one morning, were seen on the next overrun by the jolly reapers, and on the day after covered with the tall and rich stooks, so pleasant a sight to the farmer's eye. Daniel Craig and his fair niece walked among the shearers; and in the joy of his heart, the old man again became one of the bandsters for a few hours every day, and stepped vigorously across the stubble. "Sawners Carson, dinna be surprised gin I take the land into my ain hands next Whitsuntide. I could stoiter at the pleugh-end yet; and though aiblins I might be ower sair forfeuchan wi' the seven-year-auld lying lea, I could gar the summer-fallow, or the stubble rigs, gang snoving aff frae the coulter like bits o' waves from a boatie's side." Sawners Carson, the tenant, said, with a good-natured laugh, "That he wad hae nae great objections, for though Nether-Place was gran' soil, the rent was far ower high, and that his landlord maun gi'e him down thretty per cent. Wull ye speak a word for a puir body, Miss Lyndsay?" Old Daniel chuckled, and rubbed his elbow, for he thought of his half-year's rent, and the welcoming face of old Robert Carrick in that small dim cabin in his own Ship Bank, close to the Black Bull, Trongate, Glasgow.

So passed the quiet lives of the family at Nether-Place; and, before winter set in, Margaret felt as domesticated there as if she had been an inmate from childhood. She occasionally let her friends in Edinburgh hear of her welfare and contentment; but Miss Wedderburne's letters, although full of affection, gave her much pain, for she was evidently unhappy about her brother, who had again gone abroad, and had expressed some intention of joining the army. Margaret could not but fear that she was the cause of his unhappiness; but destiny had placed an insuperable bar between them in this life; and knowing that, she did not allow herself to doubt that he would soon reconcile himself to his own lot, as she had done to hers, and at last be happy, useful, and estimable.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NETHER-PLACE was now a cheerful and well-furnished house; for its proprietor was said to have renewed his youth, and things gave him pleasure which had for many dull and dreary years been objects either of indifference or aversion. Many articles of household use and ornament, that had been put into dark and unvisited nooks and corners, were brought out into the light, cleared of dust and cobwebs, and, under the assiduous hands of Mysie, now endowed with all the alacrity of a young person, acquired a new polish, and added new comfort and neatness to the dwelling. The number of chairs was increased in the kitchen-parlour—the windows were cleared of stains and imprisoned flies, dead or alive—some flower-pots, geraniums and hydrangias, and even a myrtle or two, under the fostering care of Margaret Lyndsay, diffused a lively feeling of natural beauty from wall to wall—and nothing that could stain the cleanliness of the abode was unremoved, except the clay nests of the swallows, which were all held sacred—an old colony, whose regularly-returning children were vernally expected, with their undisturbing twitterings, to the eaves, sheds, and window-angles, where they had made good their inheritance by a tenure of unnumbered summers.

Miss Wedderburne, too, had, shortly after Margaret's departure from Edinburgh, forwarded to her at Nether-Place all her little property—her apparel and her books. She frequently sent her likewise a variety of little presents, framed by her own hands and those of Harriet and Frances; and these gifts of true and unfading affection touched Margaret's heart with the most delightful remembrances, and with equally delightful hopes. The old man was proud whenever any despatch arrived by post or carrier; and, considering his niece now quite as his daughter, every kindness to her seemed a favour done to himself, and kept his heart open to the best feelings of humanity. Every evening he sat in his old arm-chair, not, as formerly, dozing in feverish reveries or in dull insensibility, but listening to Margaret's conversation about her past life, of which he never could hear enough, or to her readings from the books composing her little library—sometimes even to a song. He was a man of a strong understanding; and strong feeling was the power to which all his life had been subjected. Old as he was, he entered with all the interest of a young mind into subjects almost new to him; and any additional piece of knowledge he acquired, any pleasure his mind received from the volumes read to him, increased and enlivened his affection for the kind reader, and rendered her every day more and more essential to his happiness, and to the very continuance of his life.

Margaret knew and felt for all the strong peculiarities of his character; and, before winter set in, gently hinted to him that she had been a very idle inmate of his house, and ought to do something for her own maintenance. She at last ventured to propose taking a few scholars, so that she would both be doing good, according to

the measure of her abilities, and be able to repay her uncle for the expense he had incurred about Nether-Place on her account, or at her suggestion. Daniel Craig was not displeased at such proposal —for the habits of his long life were still strong upon him; and although he loved his niece most tenderly, and, miser as he was reckoned, would have sacrificed all his substance to prevent any evil happening to her, yet industry, he said, was always better than idleness, and money made honestly to one-self, and usefully to others, was a great gain. So it was understood over the parish that Miss Lyndsay was to open a reading, writing, and sewing school at Nether-Place.

There was a large room, formerly a kitchen when Nether-Place had contained two families, but now filled with peats, potatoes, and useless lumber. It was emptied—the walls plastered anew, where they required it—the whole whitewashed—the floors cleansed—a grate put into the wide chimney—the windows glazed—and in a few weeks nothing could be more comfortable, or better adapted for a schoolroom. Before the first fall of November snow had whitened the tops of the hills, twenty female scholars were at their various tasks—from the adjacent farmhouses, from the huts interspersed among the hollows, and from the small metropolitan village of the parish. It so happened that the teacher was old and palsied; and there was a good opening for a person of proper qualifications. But Miss Lyndsay's name was enough; and old Daniel, who had for many years lived a solitary and noiseless life, was quite happy to see the little lassies appearing "with their shining morning faces," was no way disturbed by the pleasant murmuring sound of the schoolroom, and often looked out of the door, in the afternoon, to see the innocent and happy creatures dancing away home, in fair or foul weather, over the green fields or the wreaths of snow.

Nether-Place, which had for so many years been considered a cold and secluded spot, standing by itself, and unstirred by the life that moved throughout the rest of the parish, was now absolutely the very centre of the whole; and so much happiness was derived to so many ingles from Margaret Lyndsay's judicious and conscientious instruction of her young pupils, that its name was upon every tongue at church and market. It began to be said, that on the death of old Thomas Howie, Daniel Craig was to be made an elder; much more respect was now shown to him on Sabbath in the churchyard before divine service began; he was frequently seen going into the manse; and many who had heretofore looked on him with repugnance, or almost contempt, saw now something venerable in his grey hairs, and hands opened respectfully for him the door of his pew in the kirk, that not long ago would have remained idle, rather than render him even an essential service. Old stories of the sufferings of his earlier life revived; and it was at last universally allowed that the old man must have a good heart, who gave so willingly and disinterestedly his protection to an orphan niece whom he had never before seen, and whose parents had slighted his relationship. All this was felt by Daniel, at first perhaps pain-

fully, as a reproach on his past life; but he knew what was known but to few, and much that was known to none but himself; and, therefore, he soon took all their new awakened kindness in good part, repaid it by an altered demeanour, gave and received visits, and, in short, became a cheerful, and almost a social old man.

The winter thus passed on at Nether-Place, as no winter had done for upwards of thirty years. There were even Christmas parties, with wine and cake at tea; and the large green square-sided bottle of spirituous liquor shed an unwonted radiance over a jovial company. Young men and maidens, brothers and sisters of Miss Lyndsay's scholars, matrons of extensive compass, and heads of houses, with large buttoned single-breasted coats and warm plush breeches, graced Daniel's festive board; nor were there wanting sharp-faced, snuffy-nosed maiden aunts, with clever countenances sourishly and tartishly disposed, critical even in the rural shades of the manners of town-bred Miss Margaret Lyndsay, and who stretched out their long lean mittened arms to catch the cup whose tea they threatened severely to judge and to drain, even to the fifth cup, turned upside down upon the saucer, with silver spoon laid across, in silent refusal of the exhausted lymph. A few of Margaret's scholars kept moving to and fro on little offices between the tea-table and the heartsome circle that environed it; and when all was over, kettle taken away by Mysie, and bread-and-butter melted like snow, then old Daniel looked about him with a face that was felt, and gave a grace, during which, long as it was, not a whisper or a titter was heard, although mirth and merriment trode close upon the Amen.

The winter thus passed on, in constant occupation and occasional amusement; and Margaret Lyndsay, in the discharge of unambitious but not unimportant duties, in all those unremitting and earnest attentions to her uncle, whose worth every day became more apparent in some little affecting trait, and in the natural growth and increase of her own silent thoughts and incommunicable feelings, was, perhaps, on the whole, more tranquilly and continually happy than she had ever been since the thoughtless days of her childhood at Brachead.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"HERE is a letter from my brother," said Margaret, with a face beaming in tears and smiles. "He has been cruising in the North Seas, and his ship has put into Leith. He will be here in a few days." Her uncle heard the news with strong pleasure; and Mysie, who was a principal personage on all such occasions, forthwith began to look after her department, and to get ready a comfortable cabin for the sailor. "The North Seas!" said Daniel. "Stormy regions during these March winds, nae doubt; but what care the crew o' a

great ship for onything on earth or sea? I hae been twice on board a man-o'-war, and I wad not hae felt fear myself in her far aff on the great deep. But do you think your brother will like Nether-Place? It will be ower lown for him."—"The lowner the better for one who has led his life," said Margaret; and thankful was she to God in her inmost heart that her brother was spared to see her once more, in so quiet a haven.

The Spring symptoms were astir over the fields and garden; and old Daniel was anxious to put the place into neat order. "The hedges will do—I clipped them wi' my ain hands last back-end, and at your suggestion, Margaret; and, nae doubt, they make the avenue look a hantle tosher. It will no be the waur o' a bit sprinkling o' fine gravel frae the burn-side." That was done; the flower borders dug over into a fresh-looking blackness; all the withered yellow winter leaves swept away; and in a day or two it seemed as if Spring had made a fortnight's advance, when everything had been removed that could impair the soft-stealing beauty of renovation, and the fair spirit of reawakening life.

A large merry wood fire, backed both by peat and coal, was blazing in the kitchen parlour, the room in which they had all continued to sit, for it was endeared to Daniel by long habit, and even by its dullest remembrances, when Margaret, who for several days had kept looking through the window every ten minutes, was the first to behold her brother. His gallant uniform told her it was he, otherwise she could not have known, in the tall, strong, full-grown man before her, the boy of sixteen, whom she had last seen, on the day, alas! Harry Needham was drowned. But triumphant joy destroyed all sad recollections in one flash; and the happiness in that house was perfect. In about an hour, old Daniel said he was wearied with his day's work, and would go to bed; Mysie also retired to her garret; and brother and sister, long separated, and with much to speak of that might both rend and revive the heart, sat up by the fireside to midnight.

For several days the old man was somewhat disappointed in the hopes he had formed of the young sailor. He had hoped to hear of strange and dangerous adventures, of things altogether different from his own experience, and of wonders, to the recital of which he was to be a silent and astonished listener. But, instead of all that, Laurence Lyndsay was cheerful but sedate, courteous but not communicative, and fonder of walking across the quiet fields, and by the banks of the bonny burn, with his uncle, than of narrating the perils of the sea, and stories of scenes from which his mind was willing to relieve itself in calm forgetfulness. Yet still there was something in his manners and conversations that touched the old man's heart with pleasure and affection; and he had not been a week at Nether-Place till the two were inseparable, and it looked as if Laurence had been a dweller there all his days. Little as he spoke of his own profession, that little was enough; and the curiosity of Daniel Craig being constantly kept alive, and constantly fed by anecdotes and tales that came naturally and carelessly from the lips of the sailor, he felt

attached strongly, and by strong pleasures, to his nephew, and wished that the gallant youth was not so soon to return to his ship.

Margaret did not suffer her brother's visit to interfere with her duty to her scholars; and, when they tripped and glided away in the afternoons, she joined the fireside party, and always at her approach new cheerfulness brightened over the hearth. Mysie sat, in her humble way, not far apart, making one of the family; and merriment and mirth, or grave discussion, brought on by the old man, and affectionately encouraged by the young, only ceased at the hour of evening worship, and was again more quietly renewed, for an hour or so, before their all retiring to their peaceful beds.

Margaret took her brother to her friends in the manse—the Reverend Mr Oswald and his daughter Lucy, who from her first appearance at Nether-Place had cultivated her acquaintance, and discerned at once the excellence of her character. There they often passed an hour or two, both during the day and in the evenings; and Daniel was nothing loth to accompany them, for his secluded habits had made him too much a stranger with his worthy minister, and now he felt the satisfaction and the credit of being a visitor in the most respectable family in all the parish. Mr Oswald had been deterred by delicacy from wishing to change the long-established habits of one who had been wearied with his little world; but now he welcomed Daniel to the manse as if he had been all along an intimate friend, and even hinted to him that, in the event of Thomas Howie's death, he must become one of his elders. A decent pride rose up in the old man's heart at such a communication; and he showed, by the part he took in the conversation, that he had not neglected in his apparent misanthropy the best feelings of human nature, nor yet allowed his understanding to sleep, either of the spirit or the forms of that simple church establishment to which he belonged, and of which, notwithstanding his morose life, he had always been a regular member. In this way, the families of Nether-Place and the manse became, in a week or a fortnight, more intimate and friendly than they had been for nearly thirty years; and this great addition to his happiness and respectability Daniel attributed entirely, as it was right to do, to the two young persons, of whose very existence he had, till about half a year ago, been entirely ignorant. Therefore he loved them both more and more as his own children.

The evening before Laurence left Nether-Place—and he had remained with them nearly three weeks—Daniel asked him and Margaret to come into his own bedroom; and after cautiously closing the door, as if cavesdroppers had been as numerous as flies, whereas no one was in the house but poor old Mysie at her wheel, he began to open his mind to them, whom he tenderly called his son and daughter. "I have been a hard-working man all my life—and perhaps have made gold my god—too—too much; if so, may my Maker yield forgiveness. But now He has given me another and a new heart. Ye are brither and sister, and I see you love ane anither, just as if ye were twa bairns playing amang the gowans. Ye are my natural heirs—and every shilling I hae shall be yours. When the

auld man is gane, you'll make a better use o't than he has done. You'll be mair charitable—mair open-hearted—mair liberal. But it is ower late to lament now—no ower late to repent." The young sailor spoke out boldly and loudly now, and told his uncle that he was respected in the parish—that he had injured no one—and done great good in his time by his uprightness and integrity. "As for myself, uncle, I want none of your money—God bless you—but I will think of these few weeks when I am far off; and I now kneel down to bless you for your kindness to my sister Margaret, and to beg that you will give me your blessing!" The old man's tears fell down over his wrinkled cheeks, when Laurence and Margaret both knelt down, and put their joined hands upon his knees. "May the Great God bless you both, all the days of your life, my dear children, and take you at last to His right hand, where He sitteth in light inaccessible and full of glory." They rose up, and sat down close to him, uttering not a word. "I have sent directions to get my will made. I leave Nether-Place to Margaret, and a thousand pounds forby; and to you, Laurence, I bequeath the rest of my property, of value enough to make your life more comfortable—but your trade is worth far mair than I can leave you—stick to it like a man, and leave the rest to your God."

"Uncle, I came here, as you know, ignorant of your great kindness to my sister, and of everything else. I need nothing—want nothing. I do not fear but that I shall be a lieutenant before many years go over my head. I have some prize-money, but what care I for that? I am young, healthy, strong, hope to do my duty, and if wounded or killed before the moon is old, I trust humbly in God's mercy. I am a sailor, uncle; but God is not forgotten by them He sees on the great deep. I will return to my ship as happy a man as lives. What you have said about your intentions to Margaret is enough to make all the rest of my life pleasant, even if I fall into a French prison." Margaret had never once in all her life thought about wills or testamentary bequests. All she wished was a useful and innocent life; and now, that her old uncle talked of dying, his words about hereafter made not the slightest impression upon her mind, nor did she care, when his hour came, whether he was rich or poor. Perfect disinterestedness can live but in a woman's heart; and now that the old man's talk was about his death, she never for one moment thought of anything but how to tend more affectionately and carefully his declining days, and make him forget, in a cheerful old age, the dull solitariness of a long manhood, slowly forgetful of disappointed hopes, and clinging to them long after all definite notion of their aim and object had been lost.

"Uncle, you send me to sea with a joyful heart. Look at her—look at Margaret. When I was a runaway and reckless boy, she kept her mother alive—she sat by her deathbed—she took care of my poor sisters—she covered the table—she made their beds—she saw that they were prepared for the grave—she gave them decent burial—she prayed for them to God;—and who instructed her—who upheld her—who made her what she is, good, innocent, and

beautiful—yes, beautiful, most beautiful? The God whom she has served, who will never forsake her, and who now, at this hour, shows how He will guard the orphan's head?" The old man sat silent in his chair, and kept his eye fixed upon the young sailor, while he poured out his brotherly affection in a voice altogether new, and with words so unlike the ordinary tenor of his quiet speech. Margaret wept; but Mysie knocked at the door, to announce the supper of milk and cakes, and the old eight-day clock struck nine with a cheerful din, that relieved all their hearts from a load of emotion. In a little while the supper-board was cheerful as the night before, and Laurence told more sea-stories than ever he had done since he came to Nether-Place, of which the Battle of the First of June was of itself more than sufficient to keep Daniel's eyes open an hour at least beyond that of their usual eclipse.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

For a considerable time after the sailor's departure, Nether-Place was somewhat dull and spiritless; and Daniel kept closer to his arm-chair, roaming less over his fields now that he had lost his youthful companion, although Spring in its finished beauty was now almost lost in the leafy richness of Summer. Margaret's occupation among her scholars kept her cheerfulness uninterrupted; and looking on her brother as a man likely to rise in his profession, and to be happy on the seas, her many fears for him were subdued down into an affectionate apprehension that lay quiet in her heart, except when the winds roared louder than usual through the elm-grove, and all its branches creaked in her imagination like the masts of a ship in a tempest.

At this time old Thomas Howie died, and Daniel was elected elder. This was an office of sacred honour, which, a year ago, neither he himself, nor a single soul in the whole parish, could have supposed was ever to have been conferred on one so indifferently esteemed. But now he was fully sensible of the renovation of his own natural character; and he had, with that pride which the longest course of misanthropical habits can never utterly extinguish, for some months beheld the increasing respect with which he was treated by young and old. His grey hairs were now honoured; no jeering and sneering faces were now bent upon him; and the first Sabbath that he sat down in the elder's seat beneath the pulpit, was perhaps the happiest in the old man's life.

Daniel Craig was now one of the best esteemed men in his native parish. The few friends of his youth that still survived met him in his own house, or in theirs, with unrestrained cordiality; he frequently entered doors which he had never darkened before; he took

an active and useful part in the concerns of the Kirk-Session; and not one of his brother elders was more frequently at the manse, or seen oftener with the minister. He accompanied Mr Oswald in his visitations; and he who had for thirty years been seemingly blind, deaf, and insensible to all the weal or woe of others, now said prayers by the bed of the sick, and gave alms to the poor. "Nobody ever doubted that he had a gude heart; and now ye see that loving lassie, or leddy rather, his niece yonder, has just warmed its blood, like a daughter sent to him in his auld age—and she has made her uncle a Christian." Such was the general feeling over the parish; nor was the old man himself ignorant how the happy change had been produced upon him—for never was child dearer to parent than sweet Margaret Lyndsay now to him, whose life she had blessed and renewed. At threescore and ten, the morning and evening shadows are alike solemn—as they fall upon the bright fields rejoicing in the freshness of the dewy prime, or upon the dim landscape reposing in the gradual hush of the sinking sunlight. So was it now with Daniel Craig. He calmly counted the days as they glided by over the garden-dial, now true to the changing heavens; and, especially on each Sabbath that wound up the week, he felt that he was so many steps nearer and nearer to his grave. That feeling gave him a tranquil happiness; and he looked over his farm, with a sort of gratitude to the very clover lea-fields, the green meadows irrigated by a hundred little natural rills, and the deep loamy soil that sent forth the tall wheat—when he thought that they would sustain the life and the happiness of Margaret Lyndsay when he was gone, and perhaps too a family of rosy-cheeked urchins, that would know his tombstone among others, in the cheerful churchyard gatherings, on future Sabbath-days.

Thus passed on the summer among the silent shades of Nether-Place. "I am ower happy now," said Daniel, "ower happy to live lang here; and I humbly trust that I am mair fit for the great change." The mortal body will not wait away from the dust, for all the deepest happiness of the immortal soul; and one Sabbath morning, Daniel having been longer of making his appearance than usual, Margaret went into his room, and found the old man lying asleep upon his bed with a smiling countenance—but it was in that sleep from which there is no awaking, but in another region of thought and life.

Margaret had borne every affliction that could search the nerves round the core of her heart; and youth, innocence, love, and religion, as native to that heart as mere human affections, had sustained her in them all, without any diminution of her happines, although with a great change of its character; and, therefore, it was not likely that this loss should overwhelm her with such strong grief as she had experienced at other dearer deaths. But the old man's face could not be looked at by the grateful and loving orphan without the fast-flowing tears of holy nature; and she kissed the cold cheeks of him to whom the tender expression of human affections had for so many solitary years been wholly unknown; and with her own gentle hands she closed his eyes. But for him she might have been

a dweller under the roof of paid and mercenary charity; and, but for her, he might have died in his loneliness, sullenly, and without those pious feelings that are best cherished by the breath of merely human love. The old man's latter days had been happy; and the shadow of death had fallen upon him at last, a few hours after a cheerful and fatherly conversation with one he loved, beside his own hearth, while the Bible had furnished the last words uttered to his deafened ear. Therefore all was right; and Margaret and poor Mysie shut the door of his room with many tears, but with that calm emotion that beholds the departure of the aged, on whom this life has long had but weakened claims, and who are ready, by the benign provision of nature, to yield, without resistance, to her eternal laws.

That faithful domestic now looked to Margaret as her sole earthly friend. "I hae aye been kind to my master, Miss Margaret; and surely you'll no send me awa' frae Nether-Place, now that he is dead! I am as willin, though no sae able, to work as before; and gin you will keep me on about the house, I will do a' I can to be useful. I want nae wage—but I wad like to die here, up in my ain bit garret, for a' my freens are now dead, and I am a lanesome body on the yerth."—"I do not know, Mysie, where I myself may have to go, yet I believe that I shall live here in this house. Whether I do or not, you are my friend; and friends we shall be, as long as our Maker prolongs our life." Mysie wiped the tears from her withered cheeks with her apron; and went about the usual concerns of the Sabbath-day, just as if a heavy shower of rain or snow had been keeping the family from the kirk.

Mr Oswald and his daughter, as soon as they heard what had happened, came over on the Monday to Nether-Place. Everything was ordered decently for the funeral, and Lucy remained with her friend for two or three weeks after it was over. The will was found easily in the old man's small desk, with a paper written in his own hand, full of blessings on his niece; and Margaret Lyndsay was now the mistress of the house, and proprietor of the most beautiful farm in all the parish of Casterton.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Margaret Lyndsay was now in the twenty-first year of her age; and if, as a girl, she had always been noticed even by the careless eye of the stranger, as a creature rarely beautiful among her humble companions, by the wayside at Braehead, or standing at her mother's door in that lane of the city, she was now even more so than according to the promise of her rising youth.

The pure air of the country had given colour to her pale cheeks; and her walks to the houses of the parents of her scholars, with her

friend Lucy Oswald, over the hills of bonny Clydesdale and its solitary vales, each carrying down its sparkling rivulet to swell the falls of Bonniton, Cora-Linn, and Stonebyres, had nerved her frame to a fuller loveliness, and given livelier elasticity to her steps. Now, too, despondency and fear had fled far off from the orphan; she had not only enough of this world's means to keep want henceforth from her own door, but what was dear to her as the sunshine of Sabbath, to relieve the distresses of her fellow-creatures. Nature demanded no long deep grief from her grateful heart for the death of her uncle. He had died full of days; and life was now before her to enjoy it in contentment and innocence.

She was beautiful, and she knew it. At least she knew that every one looked upon her with kind eyes; and, no doubt, she frequently heard, without thinking much or at all about it, praise of her beauty in compliment, courtesy, or affection. Her disposition was by nature gay and lively; and now, that all clouds seemed blown away from the limited horizon of her settled life, her spirits reawoke to their former hilarity, and the countenance that had so long expressed chiefly pity, sorrow, or gratitude, now shone with smiles that told what enjoyment lay spread for her over all the common scenes and occurrences of this life. She made no violent changes about Nether-Place, for she respected the memory of her old kind uncle; and she swept not away any of the antique objects that had been familiar to his eyes, however rude or homely. But still there appeared all around the difference between young and old fancies; a spirit of brighter expression encompassed the avenue, garden, house, and adjacent fields; and while everything in itself permanent was not only allowed to remain, but was carefully protected—such as the willow-arbour, the root-seats, the high beech-hedges, and the little shed, in whose niches the tufted bee-hives stood secure from every wind that blew—many little additions were made, and many little clearings away, that let in the beauty of nature more tenderly or more boldly upon Nether-Place, till the neighbours, who knew it best, declared that, though they could not tell why, it was far bonnier than before, and certainly not to be matched anywhere in all the Upper Ward.

Margaret was placed in a rank of society neither high nor low; and it was precisely that most congenial with her humble and unambitious disposition. Far higher, indeed, it was than what she could ever have dreamed of a very few years ago, when there were rarely more shillings in the house than could purchase provisions to the week's end. But still it was low enough to keep her chiefly among the peasantry, and to make their houses the chief scenes of the festal familiarities of her heart. Her extreme beauty—her perfectly blameless manners—and her occupation—so great a blessing to the little parish, made her an object of no common interest to the few resident gentry all the way down the country as far as Cora-Linn; and as few important events, even in the private history of any family, altogether escape the partial knowledge of persons no way concerned, there was a rumour, various as the minds of those who heard it, of

the real cause of her departure from the house of Mrs Wedderburne. There was something of romance, therefore, about the circumstances of her life to curious minds with whom novelty or strangeness has such strong charms; and now that she was a lady, even of landed property, the very haughtiest members of old rural races, distinguished by their fixed and immovable obscurity for many respectable generations, began to hear something extremely genteel in the words "Margaret Lyndsay," and perhaps would have reconciled themselves to the misfortune of her becoming the wife of some one of the younger unendowed Clydesdale cadets. But Margaret had seen the perfect elegance of cultivated life in the family of the Wedderburnes, and had there repaid the kindness of her benefactress by duties, unremittingly discharged to her own Harriet and Frances. Now she was independent; and had no wish to sit at tables where she might have been pardonably enough looked on as a sort of curiosity or wonder; namely, a genteel girl out of a farmhouse, a lady risen from low life, the orphan daughter of a mechanic, really not far from being on a par with the hoydenish misses of a squire's family, with red velvet gowns from the town, and red velvet arms to put into them from the country. So Margaret rather shunned than sought splendid hospitality; but always with gratitude and humility acknowledged every kindness and courtesy that she received from persons in a higher rank; and, above all, was delighted to see in her own parlour at Nether-Place those benevolent ladies who took an interest in the education of the children of the peasantry, and who therefore looked upon her as a benefactress to the whole parish.

Before many months had elapsed since her uncle's death, Margaret had her wooers, although the two first on the list were not such as to represent the passion of love as anything very tragic. Duncan Gray, portioner in Muirhouse, a young man of good morals, and not very bad manners, and supposed to be worth not far off a hundred pounds per annum, was the swain who took time by the forelock, and first hinted the modest request of Margaret's heart and hand. Some persons make wonderfully little account of such a request; and hold themselves entitled, after two or three times receiving a piece of shortbread and a glass of elder-flower wine, to ask the lady who has given them such refreshment in marriage. The stride of transition seems long and violent; and in Duncan's case it was no sooner taken, than he saw in Miss Lyndsay's involuntary smile that he had made himself rather ridiculous. At the same time, there was some little excuse for Mr Duncan Gray of Muirhouse. He had a soul for music framed; and, rejecting other everyday instruments of stop or string, he selected the Great Highland Bagpipe. On it he poured forth, not from his breast, but from beneath his arm, the loudest, longest, sighs, con amore and affetuoso. All the while he thus gave vent to the "windy suspiration of forced breath," he was in the practice, at tea-parties, of keeping his blown-up cheeks and staring eyes straight upon the countenance of Margaret Lyndsay; and, in the enthusiasm of the hour, he beheld her yielding to the voice of passion. He had mounted new ribbons on the drone of his pipes, red as the rosy

visage that puffed below; and pity the delusion of the fond youth if he felt himself and his chanter to be irresistible. But Duncan Gray was a stout young swain, who lived in a high latitude, and had an excellent appetite; so, when he found that Miss Lyndsay preferred a single life, he had recourse to corned beef and greens, and it was not thought generally over the parish that he lost a single pound of flesh on his refusal. That refusal—in whatever words conveyed, and no doubt it was in Margaret's gentlest manner, for it is said that no lady is absolutely angry with the very absurdest offer—was, it appeared, decisive. Mr Gray thenceforth played less outrageously on the bagpipe at parties where Margaret was present, and put his hand to his hat, on her appearance, with rather a hurried and abrupt demonstration; but otherwise, he was very much the same man as before, and began to pay frequent visits to Thomas Carstairs of the Haugh, whose daughter Rachel was, though no beauty, by no means contemptible either in talk, tidiness, or tocher.

The next on the list was one more likely, according to public opinion, to have been a thriving wooer — the Reverend Æneas M'Taggart of Drumluke. He was considered by himself and some others to be the best preacher in the synod; and, since Daniel Craig's death, had contrived to hold forth more than once in the kirk of Casterton. He was very oratorically disposed; and had got the gold medal at "Glasgow College" for the best specimen of elocution. This medal he generally carried in his pocket, and he had favoured Miss Lyndsay with a sight of it once in the Manse, and once when they were alone eating gooseberries in the garden of Nether-Place. The only thing very peculiar in his enunciation was a burr, which might, on first hearing, have subjected him to the imputation of being a Northumbrian; but then there was an indescribably ascending tone in his speech, running up eagerly to the top of a sentence, like a person in a hurry to the head of a staircase, that clenched him at once as a native of Paisley, born of parents from about Tyndrum, in Breadalbane. Mr M'Taggart was a moral preacher, and he had one sermon upon Sympathy, which he had delivered before the Commissioner, wherein were touches equal, or indeed superior, to anything in Logan; and no wonder, for they were in a great measure attributable to Adam Smith. This celebrated sermon did the pious Æneas pour forth, with mixed motives, to the congregation of Casterton; and ever and anon he laid his hand upon his heart, and looked towards a pew near the window beneath the loft, on the left-hand side of the pulpit.

A few days after this judicious and instructive exhibition, Mr M'Taggart, with both medal and sermon in his pocket, rode up to the door of Nether-Place, like a man bent on bold and high emprise. Mysie was half afraid to lead his steed to the stable, for he was an exceedingly formidable-looking animal, greatly above the usual stature of horses in that part of the country—as indeed well he might, for during several years he had carried an enormous Black, hight Cupid Congo, kettle-drummer to that since highly distinguished regiment, the Scots Greys. However, he was not so fierce as he

looked; but, prophetic of provender, allowed Mysie to lead him away like a lamb into a stable which he could not enter till he "had stooped his anointed head." Meanwhile the Reverend Æneas M'Taggart was proceeding to business.

The young divine took his place, after a little elegant badinage, on the parlour hearth-rug, with his back to the fire, and his coat-flaps opening behind, and gathered up each below an elbow—the attitude which, of all others, makes a person appear most like a gentleman. "Pray, ma'am, have you ever read Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments?"—"No, sir, I never have; indeed, from what I have seen said of it in other volumes, I fear it may be above the comprehension of a poor weak woman."—"Not if properly explained by a superior mind, Miss Lyndsay. The great leading doctrine of this theory is, that our moral judgment follows, or is founded on, our sympathetic affections or emotions. But then it requires to be particularly attended to, that, according to Dr Adam Smith, we do not sympathise directly with the emotions of the agent, but indirectly with what we suppose would be the feelings which we ourselves should entertain if placed in his situation. Do you comprehend, ma'am?"—"It would be presumption in me, Mr M'Taggart, to say that I do perfectly comprehend it; but I do a little, and it seems to be pretty much like what you illustrated so eloquently in your discourse last Sabbath."—"Yes, ma'am, it is the germ, which I unfolded under the stronger light of more advanced philosophy. You will observe, Miss Lyndsay, that often a man is placed in a situation where he feels nothing for himself, but where the judicious observer, notwithstanding, feels for him—perhaps pity, or even disgust"—and with that he expanded himself before the chimney, not unlike a great turkeycock with his fan tail displayed in a farmyard. Margaret requested him to have the goodness to take the poker and stir up the fire. "Certainly, ma'am, certainly—that is an office which they say a man should not take upon himself under seven years' acquaintance; but I hope Miss Lyndsay does not look upon me as a stranger." Therewith he smashed exultingly the large lump of coal, and continued, "Then, ma'am, as to the sense of propriety"—but here Mysie opened the door, and came in with a fluster. "My conscience, Mr M'Taggart, that beast o' yours is eating the crib—it'll take James Adams a forenoon job with his plane to smooth aff the splinters—he's a deevil o' a horse yon, and likes shavings better than last year's hay." This was an awkward interruption to the "young man eloquent," who was within a few paragraphs of putting the question. But Mysie withdrew—and Mr M'Taggart forthwith declared his heart. Before Margaret could reply, he strenuously urged his suit. "The heritors are bound to build me a new manse—and the teinds are far from being exhausted. I have raised a process of augmentation, and expect seven additional chawder. Ilay Campbell is the friend of the clergy. The stipend is £137, 17s. 6d. in money—and likewise from the Widows' Fund you will be entitled, on my decease, to £30 per annum, be it less or more—so that"——Margaret was overwhelmed with such brilliant pro-

spects, and could not utter a word. "Give me, ma'am, a categorical answer—be composed—be quiet—I respect the natural modesty of the sex—but as for Nether-Place, it shall be settled, as you and our common friend Mr Oswald shall fix, upon our children."

A categorical answer was one which Margaret did not very clearly understand; but she instantly felt that perhaps it might be the little expressive word—"No;" and accordingly she hazarded that monosyllable. Mr M'Taggart, the Man of the Medal, was confounded and irritated—he could not believe his ears, long as they were; and insisted upon an immediate explanation. In a few minutes things were brought to a proper bearing; and it was felt that the sermon on Sympathy had not produced the expected effect. It is grievous to think that Æneas was barely civil on his departure; and flung his leg over old Cromwell with such vehemence as almost to derange the balance of power, and very nearly to bring the pride of the Presbytery to the gravel. However, he regained his equilibrium, and,

> "With his left heel insidiously aside,
> Provok'd the caper that he seem'd to chide,"

till he disappeared out of the avenue, from the wondering eyes of Mysie, who kept exclaiming, "Safe us—he's like a rough-rider! Look now, the beast's funking like mad, and then up again wi' his forelegs like a perfect unicorn."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was at the Manse where all Margaret's leisure hours were passed, when her young scholars had left her in the afternoons, and when she desired to enjoy the pure and glad pleasure of friendship. Lucy Oswald was two or three years younger than herself, and in the busy retirement of her father's house, who had been for a long time a widower, she had had few and short opportunities of lending her heart to girls of her own age and condition. She had therefore fastened on the friendship of Margaret Lyndsay with all the eagerness of a new natural delight, and felt towards her the unreserved yet respectful love of a younger sister. Mr Oswald, too, was in every respect like a father to her; undertook the management of her property; gave her advice on all matters relative to a country life; and, indeed, the fields between the Manse and Nether-Place were seldom a day without seeing some one belonging to one or other of the families passing to and fro. There was a little wooded glen about half-way between, on the fanciful Chinese bridge over whose rivulet, built by a worthy retired Glasgow merchant, a native of the parish, Margaret and Lucy met by appointment almost every day; and at such times they often spoke to each other of their absent brothers. Laurence had been pleased with sweet Lucy

Oswald, and she with him, more than either of them knew; and that unconscious affection bound the innocent girl's heart still more tenderly to Margaret. On the other hand, she never tired of speaking of her own brother Ludovic, who had never been at home since Margaret came to Nether-Place, and who was an ensign now abroad with the army.

Ludovic Oswald had been severely wounded, and was expected home every day, on leave of absence, till his strength should be sufficiently restored for service. The new prospect of his arrival diffused more than ordinary cheerfulness over the Manse; and well could Margaret, from experience, enter into the delighted feelings of the father and sister of the gallant young soldier, about to return with wounds and honour to the home of his boyhood. Every one in the parish spoke with enthusiasm of Ludovic Oswald; praised his free character and his fine appearance; and said that no doubt he would return home cured of all his wildness, and make happy his father's heart at last, which his former thoughtlessness and errors had sorely disquieted, and indeed wellnigh broken.

Mr Oswald was a man of strong native sense, and strong native feeling. His affection for his two children filled every corner of his heart; and there was nothing in the discharge of his quiet and regular duties, as the clergyman of a small parish, so to occupy his mind as to exclude their image. Had he belonged to any other profession, and mixed with the stirring world, a man of his energetic character would, no doubt, have engaged strenuously in the affairs of life; but, as it was, the sphere of his usefulness was calm, and in its undisturbed quiet, the whole of his affections, after his wife's death, flowed towards his children. Lucy had lived in innocence and joy; and with her his parental affection was clear and unclouded as a summer's day. But Ludovic, although distinguished for the generosity and fearlessness of his character, had always been weak in his will and unsteady in his principles, so as to afflict his father with bitter disappointment, and all the heart-sinkings of a moral grief. At last he entered the army as a private soldier, and for several years had not been heard of, so that his father had almost wept for him as one among the dead. But, at all times foremost in desperate achievements, he had attracted the notice of his officers, and his respectable parentage becoming known, he had been made an ensign. In that rank he not only maintained but increased his reputation for valour and daring enterprise, and was now about to return to the house of a father who remembered his vices and follies no more, except in as far as the remembrance deepened his affection for his only boy, while the thought of his wounds and sickness brought an increase of tenderness into that heart which had so often and long bled over his rash and culpable transgressions. Lucy, who knew less about her brother's errors, looked forward to his return with unmingled rapture; and she could not praise him more to Margaret than by saying that he was as kind a brother as Laurence seemed to be, and no doubt equally brave in the presence of danger and death.

Ludovic Oswald arrived at the Manse one evening when Margaret was there; and in an hour two after the restless joy of the first meeting, Lucy and he walked with her to within a field of Nether-Place. Love at first sight is perhaps not prudent, but it is not uncommon; and although Margaret Lyndsay had lived too much for others, and too little for herself, to indulge any hasty deep emotions, yet now, in her freedom from all present anxieties, and in the softened remembrance of a life of trial, her pure heart expanded towards the happy scene she had just witnessed in the Manse, and she inwardly acknowledged that Ludovic Oswald was indeed a noble-looking youth, and that he bore bravery and gentleness upon his forehead. Next day she saw him with pleasure—the next again with delight; and in a few short weeks Margaret Lyndsay loved Ludovic Oswald with a love pure, innocent, and thoughtless of futurity, but still love that was never to pass away, and that was felt by herself, almost in sadness, to be all unlike her regard for one who had too dearly loved her for his own peace, Richard Wedderburne. She now felt that to visit the Manse daily, and to receive visits from its inmates, was a delightful, but ought almost to be a forbidden thing; and frequently she stopped short at the Chinese Bridge, and returned to Nether-Place.

Margaret was now in possession of peace, quiet, competence, health, a clear conscience, and the esteem and affection of every one in the parish. Yet now it was that she began, for the very first time in her life, to be unhappy—to be subject to fits of despondency and sadness, and to look over the green fields and the blue sky without any emotion of pleasure. Towards the Manse her heart now turned, not as it had hitherto done, with the bounding glee of affection, but with a humbling and troubled delight, of which it felt well that Lucy was not the object. When she looked back on her departure from the family of the Wedderburnes, for which they had given her so much undeserved credit, she asked herself what she would have done had it been Ludovic Oswald from whose love she had been ordered to fly? She might have obeyed her benefactress and her mother, but it would have been in despair and misery; and she might just as probably have set herself against her duty to them, and married him who had beseeched her to be his wife. That was a trial where the temptation was but weak, yet had she sometimes felt pride in having withstood it; and she had now and then suffered the pleasing flattery of self-love to delude her imagination into a belief of an imaginary virtue. Now her innocent heart was beginning to become the prey of passion; and that passion coming suddenly upon her, in the calm of her life, startled her with an idea of sinfulness and guilt. How dared her heart to beat so towards Ludovic Oswald, one who, in a month or two, would be leaving his father's house? and in the dangers and hardships of an honourable profession, in which he had already almost lost his life, what thoughts would ever he have of her, so foolishly and wickedly devoted day and night to his image? But all these struggles, between delicacy of feeling and purity of soul on the one side, and love, sudden, strong, and deep, on the other,

served but to render the young, sick, wounded soldier more dangerously dear; and, day after day, his languid countenance, brightening up through the dimness of exhaustion and pain with the flashes of his bold and heroic nature, became more irresistibly beautiful, and his voice, yet coming tremulously from a breast that the bayonet had scarred, thrilled through her heartstrings with sharper and more frequent pangs.—"I love him; yes, I love him better than life and all it contains, and I know that I must be miserable for ever!"

But her passion was not wholly misery. How beautiful now was that little glen! how like a paradise in its deep, rich, dewy, murmuring, and umbrageous calm! How blessed to walk with Ludovic and Lucy down the secret channel of the rivulet, and sit with them on seats of living stone, in niches formed by nature in the rock-walls that were all embroidered with a thousand dyes, and that waved gently, as a sigh of wind came rustling down the banks, with their graceful and gorgeous curtains of pensile sprays intermingled with buds, blossoms, flowers, and weeds, all alike beautiful in their untamed and balmy luxuriance! Then what dreams of night repeated in a more heavenly happiness these hours of day! Imagination, left free to be the minister of delight to innocence, then put words into the lips of the young soldier that dissolved Margaret's very soul in bliss. He would return to the wars no more; for all his future life her smiles were sufficient;—he pressed her to his bosom, and called her his wife; and then Margaret awoke to tears, and again renewed the same dear delightful distracting and destroying evening walks with her friend and lover; and again, night after night, dreamed the same or other overwhelming dreams! And lover he was indeed, and soon declared his love, not in a dream, but in a waking hour of the dim silent twilight, when Margaret's soul fluttered, and almost failed within her, on hearing Ludovic Oswald ask her to become his wife.

One little month had not yet seen its Sabbaths since Margaret Lyndsay had first beheld the man whom she had now promised to marry! And as she leaned her head on his bosom, she felt an upbraiding of conscience that she had delivered up her whole future life into the care of one whom she so little knew—who might be unprincipled, capricious, violent, selfish, without piety—not even in heart a Christian! For did she not know—was it not the talk of all around—that Ludovic Oswald, although generous and brave, had stained his early youth with vice, and had sorely disquieted his father's life? Was it his voice—face—person—manner—that she loved? Or was it the man himself, his character, and his virtues? Did she first know and then love the excellence of his nature, breathed in calm thoughts, and embodied in meritorious actions? Or was it vain—idle—aimless enthusiasm all?—a dream, beginning in delusion, and perhaps to end in darkness and despair? She knew not—could not know—but that she loved him was all she knew; and, before lifting off her head from his bosom, an oath was sworn, on which hung the happiness or misery of all her days to come in this world.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

What joy was in the life of Lucy Oswald when she was told by her brother that Margaret Lyndsay was to be his wife! She flew on wings to Nether-Place, and embraced her sister almost in a delirium; but Margaret's face was paler than usual, and her eyes as if red with weeping. In solitude, and before God, she had communed with her own heart, and all was confusion and bewilderment. She had sworn a solemn and a sacred oath to Ludovic Oswald, and it must not be broken; yet unhappy fears, respecting his disposition, character, principles, and faith, now forced themselves into her agitated bosom, and she felt that such love as hers was already beginning to be troubled, and might some day become utter misery. "Oh! what weakness is mine," thought she, "to yield up my soul thus to one whom I so little know!" But Lucy was now weeping with joy upon her neck; and the two friends were in a few minutes composed and happy. Lucy's voice was very like that of her brother's, and its tone revived Margaret's heart; the contagion of her joyfulness could not be escaped; so arm-in-arm, and with many of their customary smiles, they returned to the Manse, and Margaret received the solemn and somewhat sad benediction of him who was soon to be her father.

Mr Oswald, as soon as Lucy had left the parlour, took Margaret into his own room, and tenderly embraced her as his own child. "I have much to say to you, my beloved Margaret—much that I fear you know not of—but which it is right you should know. From a father's lips alone could rightly come the words I must now use." Margaret sat down breathless with strong emotions, of which a vague and indefinite fear was the chief. Mr Oswald's countenance was not very gloomy, but it was very mournful in its strong, almost stern lines and furrows, and even a tear or two made their escape. "You have promised to become the wife of my son Ludovic—God, in His infinite mercy, grant that he be a good husband to one so good; but had I known you loved him, I should have thought myself called on by nature and religion to beseech you not to pledge your faith to him, until he had given proofs of penitence for his great past guilt, and of a restored heart." The poor girl quaked at such dismal words from the lips of a father, speaking of his only son to the woman who had promised to be his wife. "Oh! sir, if Ludovic has been a great sinner, he must be a true penitent—he must, indeed. Tender and affectionate does he seem to be to his father and his sister; and, for myself, I am not afraid. It will be my own fault if ever he uses me ill when I am his wife."—"Yes, my dear child, my Ludovic loves his father and sister—and no doubt—no doubt—well must he love thee, else had he not a human heart. But what is love to the creature, without fear of the Creator? O Margaret, I must speak! My son broke the heart—ay, destroyed even the life of one not so good—no, not so good—but as young, and almost as beautiful as thyself. My son was a seducer—and, in the eye of God, what

other than a murderer, since she whom he betrayed died at last of a broken heart?" This was a blow wholly unexpected and strange to the innocent and unsuspecting Margaret. Ludovic Oswald a seducer and a murderer! He whose voice was so sweet—whose eyes were so mild—whose manners were so gentle—he who had faced death so many times on field and fort, and like one who had been made brave by a good conscience! Was she to be the wife of such a man? And, oh! did her heart tell her that it loved him, even now, with undiminished and agonising love—even now, when his own father's lips had pronounced him so dark and so cruel a criminal!

Mr Oswald told Margaret how Ludovic had betrayed to sin and shame the daughter of a respectable man—how she had followed him abroad—and shortly after died of hardship and remorse. "The story is too well known by many hundreds to have remained always a secret to you, Margaret; and as a father, and a minister of Christ's word, I have held myself bound to tell the truth. If my son confessed not his guilt to you—if he has concealed his iniquity from you, then the promise of marriage you made is void; and God, I think, will hold you innocent if you depart from it." Mr Oswald uttered these words with a faltering voice, and in great agitation. Margaret had now regained some strength, and her heart beat less quickly in what had seemed a thick and dusty atmosphere. "No, father—for by that name I call you, with all the love and reverence of a daughter—I will not break my promise; nor do I feel that if I did the great God would hold me guiltless. I will be the wife of your son—sinner as he has been, and may yet be—and if I can lead him to repentance, then will I lay down my head and die in peace."

Ludovic Oswald entered the room with a happy countenance; but their appearance at once struck him white and dumb as a ghost. "Father—Margaret—what is this?"—"O Ludovic—your sins are great—and you have deceived me indeed; but what are now my sorrows to those of her who died in shame, sorrow, and sin, and all for your guilty sake?"—"Will you then abandon me, Margaret—and have all your oaths been but empty air? Will you leave me to die of these wounds? If so, let me depart this very night." There was long—deep—dead silence—and of the unhappy three the father sobbed loudest, and walked up and down in the room, even wringing his hands. "My poor boy—if I love thee, in spite of all thy guilt—so perhaps may she continue to do, who knew it not, and may now hope to assuage in thee the darkest sorrow of the soul—remorse. Margaret Lyndsay—will you yet become the wife of my Ludovic?—and in due time I will myself, with my own voice, make you my daughter."—"Yes—I will be his wife;" and so saying Margaret went up to him, as he sat seemingly stupified with shame, fear, and grief, and tenderly kissed his forehead, and wept upon his neck. In a little while she rose up and went her ways—silently, sadly, and blind to all surrounding objects, till she found herself in her own bedroom in Nether-Place.

What a change had come over her life in one little hour! The

whole future seemed ghastly; and she shut her very eyelids in a paroxysm of despair. Old Mysie had witnessed the woeful alteration in her mistress, and was beginning to connect it, somehow or other, with Ludovic Oswald. She was afraid to knock at the door, but the weekly postman had brought a letter for Miss Lyndsay from Edinburgh, and Mysie knew it was from Miss Wedderburne; so she contrived to steal into the room, and gave it, without speaking, into the trembling hand of the poor creature, who had been tossing upon her bed. It was from Miss Wedderburne—saying that her mother was dangerously ill—and that she now implored Margaret to listen to her son's addresses, for that he had been long utterly lost to himself and friends, and that nothing could save him but marriage with the woman he loved.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Sabbath morning lay in the perfection of its summer splendour over the parish of Casterton, and every cottage was peacefully preparing to send its inmates to the House of God. But at Nether-Place the sound of the bell was faintly heard within the darkened room where Margaret Lyndsay still lay, oppressed with a load of miserable thoughts. This was the first time she had missed going to public worship since she had come into the country; but to look upon the faces of the Oswalds under her present trial was not possible, and she felt likewise that at this time she would be well away from the church. As she lay on her bed, she saw the congregation all rising up to pray, and her own pew empty; she heard Mr Oswald's voice disturbed in prayer, and saw his dark melancholy eyes, under a brow knit by the pain of keenest feelings, looking upwards to heaven in supplication for the spiritual welfare of his flock—more especially of herself and his son. She accompanied the whole exercise of the day with her heart, and when the old, faithful, and affectionate domestic at last opened the window-shutters, there came in along with the sunshine the sacred Sabbath air, as if freshly breathed from the lowly place of worship.

Margaret arose, and, knowing that on that day no hand would lift the latch of the garden gate, she took her Bible into the willow arbour, and with it composed her heart. This was the Lord's day; and upon it the heart of every sinful and sorrowful creature, if inspired with religious faith, may humbly bring itself into closer communion with the Great Spirit of the Universe. In that quiet place, with the shadows of the flowering branches checkering the holy page, Margaret felt every passion laid asleep. Unconsciously she turned to those chapters where she knew there were comforts promised to the afflicted; and now every verse seemed to overflow with more merciful meanings, and to breathe a blessing further and further into her lately disconsolate soul. That book had been her

support when watching by the bedside of her dying sisters; and nothing else but that book could have sustained her when she was hearing her mother's groans, and wiping away the big drops of agony from her forehead. When it was upon her knees, the power of this mortal life over her was subdued or destroyed; the shadow of the world to come was then brought solemnly over her thoughtful spirit; and an awe was felt, as if she were sitting more immediately in the presence of her Maker.

Tried as she had been with so many afflictions, throughout those years that, in our imagination of human life, we vainly think belong to happiness alone, Margaret had not had recourse to religion occasionally to console, but at all times to keep her alive, like the very air she breathed; and to her the Sabbath-day was so entirely set apart to God, that upon it she could, with small effort, banish all disturbing earthly emotions, and keep it sanctified, without intrusion, to the great purpose for which it was designed. Nor is such solemn and serene observance of the Sabbath rare in the cottages of Scotland. In many thousand families it is a day scarcely belonging to this life—on which the poor man's soul, wearied and worn out by labour, poverty, or other ills, renews its hold on Heaven. The turmoil of the weekdays is no more remembered, in the calm that then reigns within the religious house, than the sound of the waves that have beat against the vessel's side at sea by the crew who have moored her securely within the circle of some land-locked bay, beautiful in its perpetual calm. Each Sabbath comes upon the earth with the unbroken holiness of all that have preceded it; and thus the simple dwellers in huts are born to its observance, just as a son is born to venerate his father's grey hairs. The Sabbath-day, therefore, is a day of refuge; and the clamours, sighs, groans, cares, anxieties, griefs, and guilts of life do not enter its dawn, but they lie in wait for the soul when it shall again come out into the regions of this earth, once more to be harassed, turmoiled, and pursued.

Margaret arose on the Monday with a mind calmed and strengthened, and then she considered the life before her in all its aspects. There was much to dishearten, much to wrap her prospects in fear; but to break faith with Ludovic Oswald neither her heart nor her conscience could suffer; and although she now knew that he was not the character she had dreamed in her delight, but even deeply stained with vice, she wept to feel that she loved him with undiminished love, and, rather than not be his wife, would wish not to see the morning sun. Of Richard Wedderburne she thought with respect and gratitude, and, since it must be so, with pity; but, adorned as he was with every accomplishment, virtuous, wise, blameless in reputation, and possessed of this world's goods, he yet was to her as nothing when she thought of Ludovic Oswald, the son of an obscure country minister, poor, worn out with wounds, and, alas! a cruel and perhaps impenitent sinner. So she wrote a humble and affectionate letter to Miss Wedderburne, with many earnest prayers for her mother's recovery, but declining, in sadness and sorrow, to become her sister, and the wife of one of the best of men.

Monday evening came, and Margaret was still unable to go to the Manse; but she could not help hoping and expecting that either Mr Oswald or Lucy, or Ludovic himself, would yet come over to Nether-Place. In the twilight she walked down the lonely avenue, below the thick shade of whose trees nothing moved but the little flitting bat, and she saw a figure approaching; but it was nobody from the Manse. It was Michael Grahame of Lamington-Braes, an amiable young man who had been educated for the ministry, but who had been prevented from entering on the sacred profession by a long course of delicate health that seemed symptomatic of a consumption. Within the last few months he had regained his strength, and could walk easily from his mother's house to the Manse or Nether-Place, a distance of about five miles. He was now returning home from Mr Oswald's in the cool dusk of the evening, and knowing nothing of what had occurred between Miss Lyndsay and Ludovic, he thought of passing with her perhaps one hour of calm delightful happiness; for Michael Grahame loved her beyond all else in this world, within the secresy and silence of his own thoughtful and melancholy spirit. The few chance hours that he lived in her presence were to him sweeter than all time beside; and, sometimes hopeful even in his hopelessness, he had cherished for her a passion that preyed upon his veins, already wasted with a long slow fever, and agitated a heart often sad at the prospect of an early death. Nature had given him a soul of finest mould, endowed both with sensibility and genius: the deep religious feeling that had prevailed over the whole course of his education, had imbued his character with a pensiveness and purity that were felt by the very rudest; and his knowledge and information, so superior to those of all around him among the simple country people, gave to him an authority which he knew not he possessed, and made his name beloved and even venerated wherever it was known. In many respects he resembled that young poet whose writings he read with so much pleasure—Michael Bruce; and as he resembled him in genius, and virtue, and lowly estate, so also was the likeness perfect in sadness, sickness, and premature decay.

Never before had Margaret's pale face seemed so beautiful to Michael Grahame as it now did, with its sadness scarce visible in the shadowy light of evening; and never had her voice sounded so silver-sweet as now beneath the umbrageous arch of the dewy trees, that almost hid the silent avenue from a sight of the new-risen stars. Full of deep sensibility and imagination in all his thoughts and emotions, the youth felt walking with an angel through the shades of Paradise, and a perfect satisfaction possessed his soul as he heard breathing near him the innocent and beautiful being whom he so tenderly loved, but whom, he knew, he was never to possess. Even the thought of death itself, which was seldom wholly absent from his mind, was now pleasant, and devoid of all fear. He felt his spirituality in the pure affection of soul to soul; and knew that he and Margaret would meet in heaven. His conversation, therefore, was this evening more than usually full of beautiful images and serene thoughts; till, all at once, Margaret was inspired with an irresistible

wish to tell him the story of her love, and to beseech him for his advice and counsel. So, walking together into the willow-arbour, they sat down; and she told him everything as it was, her own love, and the shock she had sustained by the knowledge of Ludovic's vices and guilt.

She sat in the silence, waiting for the voice of a friend; but Michael Grahame was speechless. A small spark of hope had vivified his heart, and now it was extinct for ever. Between him and the grave there had hitherto seemed often to glide a visionary creature, who, with soft voice, eyes, and hands, moved him away from the burial-ground, back into the cheerful light of day. But now that fair phantom would never more stand between him and death; for it had been nothing but an image of Margaret Lyndsay, conjured up by his soul in its vain longings after human ties, and all was now seen to be a delusion and a dream. At last he looked upon her face—gently lifted up her hand—and then implored the blessing of God upon her for ever, with a voice at once so solemn and so mournful, that Margaret wept—less for herself than for him who was now her comforter.

Michael Grahame had been a playmate of Ludovic Oswald's in their boyish days, and he felt towards him that strong affection which so often subsists between persons of opposite characters. He knew his vices and his greatest guilt; but in spite of all that holy hatred of vice which was in his own pious spirit, he gently judged this transgressor. Ludovic had always been kind to him at school, and by his strength and courage had guarded his timid and sickly boyhood from injury and insult. The gratitude Michael then felt for the preservation of his whole peace of mind, which would have been otherwise utterly destroyed in his helplessness, did not cease in riper years; and he, the thoughtful, blameless, and pious young divine, cherished a brotherly affection for the brave and generous, but inconsiderate, and, alas! unprincipled soldier. He therefore now spoke in praise of his many excellent qualities; told Margaret that such promise as she had made was sacred; and that she would be the means, under Providence, of reclaiming him from evil ways, and finally fitting him for the kingdom of heaven. "With you to love him—to counsel him—and to show the beauty of holiness constantly before his eyes—Ludovic Oswald will become a good man, and a Christian. You ought soon to become his wife. He will leave the army—his wounds, bravely received, will not only justify him in so doing, but they render it necessary; for another campaign would kill him. You will live happily here at Nether-Place. Your husband will become a farmer—and where is there a more quiet and pleasant life? I see nothing but happiness before you—and, when I am in my grave, remember—O remember this evening, and give a sigh to the friendship of Michael Grahame."

They parted at the garden gate, each under strong emotion, and as soon as Margaret had gone into the house, Michael walked away by himself, in the moonlight, to Lamington-Braes.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

There was not a single house in the whole parish of Casterton in which blessings were not called down from heaven on Ludovic Oswald and his fair bride on their wedding-day. He had been a favourite from his very childhood, both with young and old; and the singular hardships which he had encountered as a soldier in the ranks, fighting in foreign countries, and afterwards his distinguished honours as an officer, when he had been found among heaps of slain, with the colours of his regiment round his body steeped in blood, had either obliterated from the memories of all, or softened down their moral judgments of his manifold and grievous errors. As for Margaret Lyndsay, her happiness was prayed for as for one not only blameless and without faults, but who had been the best friend of their children, and the cheerer of all their hearth-sides. There was no reason why they should not be happy; and nobody had either doubts or fears that young Mr Oswald would make a good husband, and become on his own property of Nether-Place one of the most useful and respectable of all the landholders in the country-side. Accordingly, there was not a hayfield for miles around in which long life and happiness were not cheerfully wished to the young couple, as the milk-can went its rounds; and there was a kind of rural holiday, both to the idle and the labouring, within all the green bound of Casterton.

The marriage took place in the Manse, and they were married by their own father. Mr Oswald was himself not an old man, but his head, at fifty years of age, was as white as that of fourscore; and with an uncertain voice he pronounced the benediction on the head of his son and daughter. The bridegroom trembled beneath his father's blessing, and the room was hushed when the father folded Margaret to his bosom, and wet her beautiful braided auburn hair with his tears. He had united for ever in this life one of the most innocent of human beings with a man whose frailties he had but too well known, and who, he feared, was scarcely worthy of such a wife. But it was his own and his only son, and he ventured to hope that, with Margaret Lyndsay to cherish and protect, his nature would be born again, and that he would show the depth of his repentance by a life of well-doing and religion. A band of young girls, who had been the bride's scholars, all neatly dressed in white, were present at the ceremony; Lucy was bride's-maid; and the evening sun sank behind clouds betokening calm and beautiful days, and left the sky open in its settled serenity to an unhaloed moon and the dewy stars.

Margaret was happy with her husband. He had determined to leave the service; and indeed his constitution had suffered so much from his severe wounds, that to have returned to its fatigues would have been death. In another year the lease of Nether-Place would expire: then he was to become a farmer, forgetful of all the woes of war, and to lead a life of peace among his own and his father's friends in his native parish. It was the duty of his wife to love and esteem her husband, and she did so with all the simplicity, inno-

cence, and fervour of her nature. The young couple were as happy as every one said they would be; and, after homely and heartfelt receptions at the houses of all who visited at the Manse, and forenoon calls at many a humble cottage, where young Mrs Oswald was received with smiles that illuminated the low-roofed and dim apartments, they became, in their retirement, constant dwellers within their own pleasant Nether-Place, and the unnoticed current of their lives flowed calmly and lightly on, through weekdays and Sabbaths, with as much happiness as belongs to this changeful and melancholy life.

There had, at last, been little of the delusion of the imagination with Margaret Lyndsay towards the man she loved; and as that had vanished, far deeper feelings had taken its place. Having voluntarily linked her fate with one to whose faults she was not a stranger, her affection for him was made still more tender by the hope that she might comfort his heart in all its sorrows, and turn and keep it in the paths of peace. She did not try to persuade herself that she had married him merely that she might turn him from the error of his ways; for she knew that she loved him but too, too well, and that she was his fond and affectionate bride. But she knew also that her love for him was pure, disinterested, deep, and unchangeable; and that no happiness on this earth could ever be to her equal to that of seeing him respected and respectable before his fellowmen, and obedient to the laws of God in thought and deed. And in that happiness she was not wholly disappointed: Ludovic Oswald was domestic in all his habits—kind to her, and willing to do good to all his neighbours. His religious feelings seemed to be sincere, and his whole conduct to his father and sister, and in all the relations of life, such as was delightful to be witnessed by her who now lived but for him, and in his virtues and worth placed all her earthly happiness. The marriage turned out just as everybody had expected; and when the cheerful new white-washed walls of Nether-Place glanced through the trees upon the labourer in the field, or at the doors of the farm-houses in valley or on hill-side, many a kind thought was sent towards the family within, and many a prayer for long life to them, plenty, and peace. How delightful to the wife of Ludovic to see his father's face now unclouded with anxiety, and that excellent man restored to an untroubled life! She knew, from his own heart-rending confessions, what had been the solitary agonies of paternal affection. Of all sorrows, what can equal the fear in a father's heart for the welfare of the soul of an only son! Ludovic had played at his feet—had wept the transient tears of a child when his mother died—had grown up in beauty and strength—had sinned, suffered, repented—and been forgiven by his father on earth, as it was devoutly hoped by his Father in heaven. And now he was living a tranquil and innocent life within a few furlongs of the house in which he was born—respected as well as loved—and attentive to all the charities of a Christian life. The very lines in his father's face seemed now to be smoothed, and there was nothing now but a reverend beauty in his white locks; all that spoke of suffering and

sorrow had disappeared from the glistening silver of his head; his tall person had now recovered its erect gait, and he walked up the steps of the pulpit like one whose youth had been renewed.

Scarcely a day passed that he and Lucy did not step over to Nether- Place; at times mirth, merriment, and joy, rang through the house that had for so many years been dull and silent—and none ever left it without carrying pleasure away with them, and leaving a blessing behind. Yet such seemed the waywardness of the human heart, and such the imperfection of human happiness, that often Ludovic Oswald, even when sitting by the side of his young wife, sank into gloomy reveries; and Margaret was sad to hear his long heavy sighs, often dismally drawn in sleep, as if from the very depths of his heart. Sorrow for past guilt, thought she, is now visiting him in his dreams, and his sleeping soul knows not of its own repentance. But he will awake to happiness—and so he did every morning; for, with one so good and so beautiful, who must not have been happy, even if conscious of something hidden, something too terrible to be known, and even if doomed inevitably to misery at last? Such was indeed the condition of Ludovic Oswald; and even in the bosom of Margaret Lyndsay, conscience smote him both waking and asleep, and told him to prepare himself some day or other to forsake that heaven.

CHAPTER XL.

There had been something sad and mournful in the humble nuptials of Ludovic Oswald and Margaret Lyndsay, notwithstanding the rejoicings that had accompanied them in many a field below the open sky, and by many a hearth-side below the roofs of peaceful cottages. Nor had that melancholy diminished perhaps the happiness of the bride. It had sobered her joy, and had, by many afflicting thoughts, turned her heart with a more yearning tenderness towards her husband. Young as she was, she had lived long enough not to imagine either perfect bliss or perfect goodness in this world; and the knowledge of her husband's transgressions carried into her heart, along with all the fondness of an entire affection, also pity and compassion, and a profound hope, that in the calm of domestic life he would be restored to that tranquillity which an erring conduct had impaired, and which it must be her constant aim to revive and guard. More cheerful and smiling brides there had been many than Margaret Oswald; but few that looked forward to better prospects, in faith of the power of virtue and religion to wipe away all grievous recollection, and to bring at last comfort and peace.

Her husband had left home for a day, on a visit to an old schoolfellow, a few miles over the hills; and Margaret was sitting in the willow-arbour, during the short sunshine of mid-day in early winter,

when Mysie came to tell her that there was a person who wished to speak with her—a woman with a little boy in her hand. While they were yet conversing, the stranger came towards them, along the garden-walk; and Mysie, whose curiosity did not suffer her to forget her respect to her dear young mistress, went away. The stranger was rather meanly dressed; but she had an appearance and demeanour above common, and there was something in her voice and figure unlike a mendicant—something that, by its self-possession, rather intimidated if not alarmed. She sat down, without being asked, on the seat; and Margaret, who had risen, did the same, without either of them for some minutes uttering a word. The little boy, not seemingly above four years of age, stood at Margaret's knee, and looked into her face with a smile; but there was something in his features and expression that struck to her very heart—for his eye, and the outline of his countenance, and the smile about his lips, at once declared that he was the son of Ludovic Oswald.

"My name is Hannah Blantyre—perhaps you may have heard it—if not, then Ludovic has deceived you even more basely than he deceived me. If you married him with the consequences before your eyes, then the guilt, the shame, and the ruin be upon your own head." Margaret heard the words—each one of them—and all of them together—in a hideous and horrible huddle, and she almost repeated them aloud in the quaking fear of some unimaginable evil. "Yes—yes, I have heard your name: I was told that you were dead—dead of a broken heart. But how is this? Does my husband know that you are alive?"—"Ludovic Oswald is not your husband—he is my husband—the father of that little boy there whom you hold by the hand, and my ain wee Ludovic was born in lawful wedlock. Ay, sinner as I was when first he took me to his bosom, I was the wife of Ludovic Oswald when that helpless creature saw the light of this unhappy world." Margaret heard her words—her eyes were fixed with a ghastly stare on the sky, but they saw nothing—she did not faint, but a strong convulsion shook her, and she gave one shrill shrieking cry. "Poor woman," said the stranger, "I pity you—but my little Ludovic shall not be a bastard when I am dead. Had I had no bairn, I might have lived on in my desertion—for I know its father hates me; but shame shall not be on his bonny head; therefore I come to claim my husband, and let the curse fall at last on the guiltiest head."

Margaret felt that there was dismal and dreadful truth in the woman's voice. She was no impostor—she had come boldly to her husband's house—she had brought with her their child—and there she sat, not insultingly, but relentlessly, and with a stern resolution to be acknowledged—a wife. "I was told you had died of a broken heart, and I have often wept for you, Hannah Blantyre; but henceforth, all my tears must be for myself—for in this world now, hope is there none for me!"—"Neither is there any hope for me! I knew Ludovic Oswald before you ever saw his face—I lay in his bosom before he had ever loved you—I have been with him in places of blood and horror not to be thought of or named—and this is my—

our boy—and none shall hoot him when I am in my grave, none shall drive him away from the playground, or force my Ludovic, pretty little fellow, to sit in a corner, in shame, and sobbings, and tears; for he was honestly born—and his father shall say so—or I will call down God's eternal curses on his head. But I can prove our marriage, although he thinks not; and, when my boy has been righted, what cares his miserable mother to sleep with the slime of worms?"

"Will you go and bring me from the house a cup of water?" said Margaret—and the woman instantly did so. She brought Mysie along with her, and they found Margaret lying on the ground.—They lifted her up, and carried her into the house. "And wha may ye be, and what hae ye been saying, that has stricken my bonny young mistress into a dead faint? Are ye ane o' thae fortune-tellers, and hae you been frichtening her about her husband's being awa' the noo, and obligated, wi' a' his wounds, to gang again to the bluidy wars? De'il tak a' the gang o' you! But didna her sweet innocent face upbraid you, woman?—See, see—she's coming to hersel."—"My name is Hannah Blantyre, you idiot—no spaewife—so none of your staring," said the stranger fiercely; and with these words she threw water upon Margaret's face, who in a few minutes returned to life and sense. She opened her eyes, and instantly shut them again, saying, "It's all true, I see—no dream." Mysie sat down, confounded and terrified—and the stranger stood with a face almost unmoved, and then half frowning, half touched with a dim and doubtful pity. "I believe all you say," said Margaret; "I am no wife—my name is Oswald no more—it is Lyndsay—you, and not I, are his wife. Yes—Ludovic Oswald is your husband, not mine—I am nothing but a poor, miserable, deluded, and dying sinner."

Alarmed at the wild looks and words—the weeping, and the sobbing, and the groans—the little boy began to cry aloud by the bedside, afraid even to touch his mother, and hiding his face. "Hush, brat!" said she fiercely, and shook him with a strong arm till he shrieked. "Oh!—my God—are you the wife of Ludovic Oswald, and is it thus you use his child?"—"Yes! it is thus I use his child; and ask him when he first comes again to your bed, how he used me. Ask him if he ever cursed me—if he ever left me behind him when the bayonets of the French were at hand—if he ever basely suspected me of infidelity to him, my seducer first, and my husband afterwards. Ask him if now he has married another—you yourself—and, if he dares to deny Hannah Blantyre to be his wife, if he will face God in judgment, after swearing that this child is a bastard? Stand up, you wailing imp—and let her see a child that may show its face with the best bairns in all Scotland through, the son of Ludovic Oswald, and me—Hannah Blantyre."

But it was not long before the passion of this injured and violent woman subsided. She had not come to insult Margaret, but to vindicate her child's birthright. By degrees she felt pity for her whose life had so suddenly been made just as wretched—more so—than her own, and she even wept by the bedside. She was asked to stay all night in the house; but that seemed unnatural to her, worn out and

wearied as she was; so she took the refreshment that poor Mysie gave her and her boy in the kitchen, and then said she would go. "I passed a hovel, about half a mile off, on the road-side. An old woman was at the door, who asked me where I was going; and I said I might perhaps ask a night's lodging from her before it was dark. I will sleep there—when your master comes home, tell him where I am to be found." And, so saying, she wrapped her tall and emaciated figure in a tawdry worn-out red shawl, and, taking her boy by the hand, she strode off, seemingly in anger, pity, and desperation.

CHAPTER XLI.

A STUPOR, both of intelligence and of feeling, held the silent and indeed speechless sufferer in her bed from that fatal afternoon till next mid-day, when she awoke somewhat revived from a short two hours' sleep. The old affectionate creature had sat beside her all the night long, and had frequently knelt down weeping, and said a prayer for the peace of her sorely-troubled mistress. Now and then Margaret had sat up wildly on her bed, as the winter winds blew shrilly past the window, and the leafless branches that almost touched the roof creaked, swinging in the fitful blasts. A few ejaculations, uttered with clasped or clenched hands, were all that were heard from her during the long dark howling hours; and more than once, when she was lying exhausted, with white face and shut eyes, the silent watcher feared she was dead, and stooped down over her lips, to hear if they yet sent forth feebly the breath of life. Few words had the faithful servant been accustomed to utter in her quiet labours—but not a few feelings were lodged within her breast; and no mother could have looked upon her sick child with more eager tenderness than did she, who had long been a stranger to all emotions but those of mere common humanity, now look upon poor Margaret Lyndsay. She had been an orphan as well as her mistress, but she did not remember the time she had ever had a parent; as a slave almost had she lived in one house or another, working hardly and silently all her days; many of her latest years had been passed in the service of old Daniel Craig; and now, when the period of her life was near at hand, a new joy had been given to her in her love for her sweet-tempered young mistress, living so happily with her affectionate husband. What a change was this! Grief, shame, ruin, horror, and despair, all at once, without any warning, brought into Nether-Place—and her master and mistress husband and wife no more!

About mid-day, Margaret, as if suddenly restored to her strength and self-possession, rose up, and told Mysie to go over to the Manse, and request Mr Oswald to come immediately to Nether-Place. She had lain down the night before in her clothes; and, while the old

messenger was away, she decently arranged her dress and her hair, and washed the stains of weeping from her cheeks, before Mr Oswald should appear. A ghastly countenance it indeed was that met her in the mirror; and strange to her ear was the hollow voice of her own "Lord have mercy upon me, a sinner!" The tread of her steps had a woeful echo in the silence of the house; nor, as she sat down on the window-seat, where she had so often reclined on Ludovic's bosom, had she courage even to look at her Bible, so sick in hopeless anguish was her miserable soul.

Mr Oswald, fearing, from the face of the old servant, that Margaret had been seized with some alarming illness, lost no time in being at Nether-Place, and Lucy was not one who, on such an occasion, could remain away from her sister. For a while Margaret sat like a stone before them, and only gasped when she strove to speak. "I am not a wife—Ludovic has deceived us both. But, O sir! I am your daughter still—Lucy, I am still your sister—and I hope that I may be buried in your burial-ground." These were words at first not to be understood; and Mr Oswald looked for a moment at Margaret, as if he thought a quick fever had already touched her brain. But she continued—"Hannah Blantyre is alive—she is your son's wife—and she is here at hand to prove me an unhappy sinner." Mr Oswald took her to his bosom; and her beautiful auburn hair lay still as death beside his locks, that had for some years been as white as the mountain snow. Lucy, stunned by the communication of an almost incomprehensible misery, fell upon her knees and wept, for she alone could now weep, upon the motionless hand of her sobbing sister. Just then the door opened, and Ludovic Oswald, with a smile upon his face, entered the room.

His conscience, although it had often gnawed him, had still oftener slept, for all love had left his heart for Hannah Blantyre; and his love was as deep and as sincere as love could be, in the heart of an unprincipled man, towards Margaret Lyndsay. His love had not been merely a selfish passion, kindled by her exquisite beauty and loveliness, but it was accompanied with the tenderest and sincerest affection. He believed that no proofs existed of his marriage with Hannah, and that the two persons who had been witnesses to it were both dead. But that signified nothing now; he dared not deny the truth in the awfulness of the scene before him; and first in the deathlike and ghastly silence of the miserable man, and then in his frantic agonies, it was seen by one and all that his guilt was even as it had been said to be, and that there was no hope. Margaret upbraided him not, for she felt as if on the brink of the grave, and her forgiveness was perfect. His father fixed his eyes, that expressed nothing but a glare like that of haunted insanity, upon his son, who was weeping and gnashing his teeth, and tearing his hair, and calling upon God to strike him dead, and fiends to carry his soul to perdition. "Oh! Ludovic, Ludovic, what words are these?" said Margaret, with a voice gentle as that with which she had spoken the day she was a bride, and the wretched man fell down in a fit upon the floor.

Hannah Blantyre had seen her husband pass by from the door of the hovel; and, with her boy, followed him soon after to Nether-Place. With her long black hair streaming over her brown face and dark burning eyes, she too now joined them, who were lying down, or kneeling, or sitting, in the stupor of their great grief. When Ludovic Oswald awoke from his fit he beheld her visage, and shut his eyes with a shudder and a shriek. "Am not I your wife? Here, take our child, and I will go my ways never more to torment you. Had I foreseen all this, perhaps I might have suffered him to live in shame, and left him upon the parish, a pauper's brat. But the Great God is terrible; and woe be to all them who break His holy laws."

Mr Oswald had now recovered his fortitude, and he gently bade his son's wife, since such she was, leave the room for a little while, till the unfortunate man had regained some self-possession. "I will do so, sir—I know not how this may end; but fain could I lay me down and die. My head is rending, and a strong fever is in my blood eating me up. Come, my little boy, come away to our last night's straw. You all know where I slept, and there you will find me—for I am not able to walk farther; and this is not the house for me." And casting her wild eyes, brimful of large tears, upon Ludovic, who was still lying convulsed upon the floor, and with a look, almost of pity, upon Margaret, she went away, and none stopped her, with her little thoughtless boy, to the hovel.

CHAPTER XLII.

Even a weak soul and a weak body will bear a wonderful weight of grief, before they lay themselves down in utter exhaustion upon the grave. But Margaret Lyndsay—for that now was her name once more—had a strong soul; and her frame, although delicate in its gracefulness, had been nerved by the constant and healthful occupations of an innocent, simple, and useful life. Grief, therefore, which at first had stunned and smote her down, soon left her at liberty to walk meekly about as before, and was unable to sink into the paleness of her cheeks the beauty that, ever since her childhood, had gained such general admiration and love. None ventured to intrude upon her in such affliction—none had a right to see her suffering under it, except Mr Oswald and Lucy; but they were almost objects of as great pity as herself, and perhaps supported themselves with less fortitude. For with her all hope in this life was utterly gone—and only where there is no hope can there be perfect resignation—a confused sense of never-ending ignominy, almost akin to sin, lay upon her soul day and night, rendering indeed the night darkness grateful, and during the day binding her eyes down to the earth. Every tie that linked her to life was cut at one blow; this world was

not for her; and she even longed, but still with the piety of her submissive spirit, to go "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

Where was Ludovic Oswald? That none knew. He disappeared utterly, and no traces of him could be discovered. It was said, some weeks afterwards, that he had been seen—or one like him—at a seaport town, from which a transport with recruits had sailed for the West Indies. But this was an uncertain rumour; and many believed that he had died by his own hand, in some remote and solitary spot, where it might be long before his body was found by huntsman or shepherd. Margaret did not fear this often—but sometimes the thought came to horrify her mournful desertion, and then it seemed to her as if life was a painful and sick swoon, too severe long to be borne.

Hannah Blantyre still lay in the hovel by the side of the high-road. Her long journey of many miles on foot, carrying her child almost all the way, and her carelessness of herself in that desperation, had completely exhausted her, and she could not, without pain, lift her head up from the straw. She was the lawful wife of Ludovic Oswald, and not to be forgotten by his wretched father. A few days had elapsed before that father could rise from his own bed; and, on the first Sabbath after this dreadful destruction of all peace, there had been no public worship. The kirk-door remained shut for the first time during many years; and the sound of that little tinkling bell was missed in valley and upon hillside. But now Mr Oswald had strength to leave the Manse, and he walked over to Nether-Place. "I will accompany you to Hannah Blantyre," said Margaret with composure: "I wish to hear from her something more about my condition; and besides, I, who have enough of this world's gear, will extend my charity, if indeed it deserve the name, to her who seems to have nothing." It was dusk; and Margaret, putting her arm within that of her father—for so he was still—they walked to the hovel.

Its walls were built of mud, and its roof was turf. It stood upon a patch of ground where two hedges made an angle, in front the high-road, and behind a deep ditch choked up with brambles. An old crone had lived in it for many years, and harboured, perhaps for a penny a-night, the houseless beggar. She was standing at the entrance—that shrivelled bowed-down beldam—with little Ludovic in her arms. The moon was rising, and the child was prattling about it and the stars to his withered nurse, quite reconciled to her haggard countenance, sunk eyes, and the mumbling voice of dotage. "Tell the child's mother to speak with us, good old Susan. My pretty boy, I am your grandfather," and so saying, Mr Oswald took little Ludovic into his arms. Margaret shuddered—but she too kissed the harmless creature, that smiled, and laughed, and murmured, in the fulness of his joy, at the smoky door of the hovel, with his mother lying within, a sick and forsaken beggar. On hearing who were there, Hannah Blantyre rose up tottering from the straw, and came out into the open air, begging to be allowed to sit

down upon the bank. She did so, while the others stood by—Margaret, the old woman, and Mr Oswald, with his grandson perfectly happy, now hushed in his bosom.

"I need not, cannot tell all the course of your son's affection for me: it began surely in innocence with us both—at least, so I thought—and it was long, long indeed, before I knew any other thoughts. I sinned, and I wish not now to blame Ludovic for taking me away from my father's house. The old man—for old he was in his misery—has been for years dead; and had I been what I ought to have been, all this would not have happened. I loved Ludovic—and I once thought he loved me; if he never did, the greater was his sin." Mr Oswald was agitated by her voice, now so much calmer than it had been on that dreadful night; and something like the soft tones of innocent youth, before she had erred and become miserable, subdued the speech of the unfortunate woman. He set down little Ludovic on the bank beside his mother, and she took him, willing as he was to go from one to another, into her emaciated and ill-clad breast. Margaret could not restrain her tears; and the old woman, who indistinctly heard what was said, but still listened with a confused curiosity, leant forwards upon her staff, and fixed her dim eyes upon the speaker. "Ludovic was about to embark, as a private soldier, for Holland; and I had either to stay behind, with this boy then unborn, or to try to leave this country with my seducer. He was indifferent to life as I was; and he acknowledged me to be his wife in the presence of several persons—two of whom, the wives of soldiers, are yet alive, Jean Thomson and Elizabeth Shaw: I can tell you where they both now are, although he believes them to be both dead. He wished me to stay in Scotland; but I went with him, and much hardship and misery I endured for his sake. You may well weep, unhappy lady; but you will forgive me, for, wicked as I was and am, yet still I am the wife of Ludovic Oswald." Margaret only said, "Yes, yes, you are!" and sat down at a little distance on the same bank.

"This child was born, and I nursed him. Need I say that I loved him better than myself, and gave him my breast to drink in hunger, thirst, starvation, and cold; often without a bed to lie on, no roof over us, no fire to warm us, on the roadside, and in frost and snow. But Ludovic had no trust in me, for I had broken my father's heart; and he accused me of sin I thought not of in my misery, and of forgetting that I was his wife. No doubt, much evil, guilt, and sin did I see; and often have I suckled my little child among the abandoned and the brutal, surrounded with curses, and oaths, and drunkenness, and shocking crimes. But had I been his wife here in this parish, at Nether-Place itself, and respected by the good and the religious people who live here, I could not have been more true to my husband than I was in that dreadful company. He hated me at last—drove me from him with curses as a prostitute; and I, alas! answered with angry words and a raging heart. I agreed to leave him for ever, and to take my child with me away from his eyes. Ludovic had been away from me with the army for two months, and all that

time I was starving. When we met again, an officer had been kind to me, and given me food; but may I never meet with mercy, if I will not carry to the grave a body and a soul free of all sin to my husband." The poor creature ceased with a sob, and Margaret said, "I believe it, I believe it; your latter days may yet be passed in peace."—"No, no, I am dying: and O that I had never come here, for I see you are one who ought not to have been made unhappy! Take care, Mr Oswald, take good care of little Ludovic; and when I am dead, perhaps his father will return, and then you—yes, you, young woman—may be his wife, and perhaps live happy yet, when poor sinful Hannah Blantyre is in her grave."

The exertion of speaking so long and so vehemently quite overpowered the unfortunate woman, and she stretched herself out, with her child in her arms, all her length upon the ground. "She is my son's wife," thought Mr Oswald; "and it is my duty to protect her while she lives. My son has confessed she is, and that is enough." He told her that she must not lie another night in the hovel, but be carried, with her son, to the Manse. For a long while she was obstinate—sullen—or angry in her misery, and in sight of the misery occasioned by her appearance among those who, in their ignorance, had before been happy. "I lived for three years without any hope of Ludovic ever seeing me again—I had agreed to that—and he supported me in a place remote from all who had ever known me. But I heard by chance of his coming home and marrying another; and then my heart boiled both for myself and this laddie. All may yet be right, when I am gone. I give my boy into his grandfather's hands. As for myself—let me die in this hovel, and you will pay the old woman for her trouble; and let me be buried in a corner, sir, of your own churchyard—among nettles, or anywhere—without a stone—and let such a wretch be forgotten for ever." She rose up with these words, and moved towards the hovel; but she fell down, after a few steps, and crawled into the smoke. The little boy, frightened, he knew not why, ran after her, crying upon his mother; and the old woman, tottering upon her staff, followed them into her hovel, leaving Mr Oswald and Margaret sitting, without the power of motion, upon the bank—while by this time the sky was bright and beautiful with all its luminaries, and perfect silence prevailed over the clear winter night, that had yet scarcely lost the softer beauty of autumn.

CHAPTER XLIII.

The parish of Casterton was but a small one, and although not shut out by impassable mountains from those that surrounded it, yet it was a cheerful seclusion within itself, and all its families were more or less interested in each other's welfare. The greater part of the inhabitants lived in the oblong vale that was nearly hemmed in by pastoral

hills, and of which the little village that sat on a wooded eminence was the centre and the heart. About a score of houses were dropped down here and there in the glens that winded away up into the higher country, as if they had belonged to other parishes; but in their remoteness they still belonged to Casterton, from accidental circumstances in the history of the district, known only to antiquaries who had communicated their knowledge to Mr Oswald, when he was writing his "Statistical Account" for Sir John Sinclair.

In such a parish, such a tragical and strange misfortune as had now befallen the family at the Manse and Nether-Place, made a strong and lasting sensation, and at every fireside afforded subject, not of idle gossiping and heartless talk, but of sad and serious and mournful conversation. Many a mother whose daughters had been taught by her almost all they knew, wept bitterly for Margaret Lyndsay; the girls, now on the verge of maidenhood, who had all tenderly loved their instructress, would have done anything to see her restored to peace; while the very children who had been accustomed to go to Nether-Place to meet their sisters in the evening, knew that some calamity had fallen on her who used to smile upon them so kindly, and they listened with hushed faces to what they heard their parents saying about her and her sorrow. It is scarcely possible to destroy utterly—to dig up by the very roots—affection for any human being who has long possessed it; and perhaps the difficulty is greatest in cases where the person beloved has been of a very mixed character. When the change is complete—the fall from good to evil sudden—and a total reversal of opinion takes place—then our regard may be wholly crushed; but when, as in this instance, we have known the imperfections of the man who falls into deeper and darker sin, we suffer no violent revulsion of our moral judgment, and continue to think with affection still on him who has ceased to deserve any part of it; being unable, for a few frailties, follies, or sins more, to drive from our hearts a friend whom all along we knew to be loaded with imperfections. It was so now with every family in the parish towards Ludovic Oswald. Besides, their profound respect, indeed veneration, for his father, made it impossible for them utterly to condemn or abhor the son; and then, too, where was Ludovic now? Dead, perhaps—or, if not so, worse than dead—wandering with remorse, nobody knew where, and probably seeking death in a foreign country from war or pestilence.

For several Sabbaths Mr Oswald's pulpit had been filled by young preachers, yet unplaced; and there were various rumours over the parish concerning his health, and the way in which he was bearing up under this blow. Some said he would never be able to appear in the kirk again, that his body was weak, and that his mind had even more sadly given way; but that was an idle rumour, for his elders had seen him, as well as several of his brethren, and it was known from them that, although unable to undertake the fatigue of Sabbath service, he was sound in mind, and perfectly resigned to his great affliction. Besides, Hannah Blantyre, his son's real wife, was at the Manse lying in a fever, which it was thought would prove

mortal—and what with her illness, and what with his own, both of body and mind, no wonder that their minister kept within doors. It was a great relief to the congregation that he did so; for they could scarcely have borne to see his face or to hear his voice in that his sore and strange trouble and distress. It was something out of the way of human misery; and silence, retirement, and undisturbed communion with God, were felt to be necessary even for the very upholding of the life of one so terribly tried as their friend and father.

Very few in the parish had seen her who had come to claim her husband. It was known that she was in the Manse—dying, it was said; and deeply as they all felt for Margaret Lyndsay, deceived and betrayed as she had been, yet Hannah Blantyre was the wife of Ludovic Oswald, and therefore entitled to be where she was, and under the care of his father. No good—no simple heart can wish the death of any human being; but still, when it was said all over the parish that the stranger was dying, and that it was understood she did not wish to live, as she had never been happy with her husband, there was a universal hope that Margaret Lyndsay might yet be restored to peace and respectability as the wife of Ludovic Oswald. All was dimness, obscurity, and uncertain fear; but their minds dived through the future, and saw happiness at a distance both at the Manse and Nether-Place.

Hannah Blantyre became weaker and weaker every day, and so attenuated, that, when she strove to turn herself in her bed, the very skin cracked over her bones. Yet still she retained that eager and bold spirit that she had received from nature, and that had been strengthened by the courses of a miserable and desperate life. Her large black eyes yet kept their lustre, and, weak as she was, she spoke, whenever she was permitted, with animation and earnestness about her boy. Of her husband she spoke without any bitterness, but as one in whose affections she had long ceased to have any place. Notwithstanding her hopeless situation, and all their deadly quarrels, she still thought of him with pride; that feeling, perhaps, had inextinguished love below it; for not unfrequently she kept looking on her boy with tears, and she had a mournful pleasure in calling him by his name, "Ludovic," as if that name stirred up thoughts and remembrances that were deep sunk, but not buried in her bosom. But the fever burned away slowly and surely on; and although her eyes were clear, and her voice not unsteady, and her face, when all her figure was covered up, not like the face of death, yet the least skilful and experienced in mortal malady knew that the emaciated body must, in a very few days, lie perfectly quiet on its now restless bed.

Mr Oswald and Margaret sat at last by her deathbed, for so it turned out to be, although that day she had seemed somewhat stronger, and not the slightest wandering of mind had been observable. Mr Oswald had quieted, as far as he dared to do so, her many apprehensions of a future life, that had within a few days come darkly and dimly over her spirit. Although her guilty husband was

his own son, he did not fear to charge him with his sins, and to tell the dying woman that she had been hardly used by a fellow-creature in this world. "My daughter, you were tempted by my son; and you and he fell into sin—more sinful he than thou! Dissension, distrust, and jealousy, embittered your wedded lives; and anger and wrath at last divided them. But the child loves its mother—see how, with its little hands, it plays with yours, and smiles into your face! Whatever may have been your own errors, you have respected nature in this infant, and it loves its loving mother. Oh! Hannah—the heart of Ludovic's father turns towards thee; and I now say that thou hast been more sinned against than sinning, and mayest trust in Him whom alone we can trust, that thine may be the kingdom of heaven."

Margaret Lyndsay was sitting at the foot of the bed—nor did her own miserable woe render her callous to the sight of the dying woman. She went up to her with a cordial in her hand, and said, "Will you take this from me—perhaps it will do you good?" The poor creature took the cup with a faint smile, and Margaret raised her head from the pillow, while she drank the cooling and reviving draught. "We are not enemies," said Hannah. "No—no—we are friends; and when I am dead, and Ludovic comes back, then you will be man and wife, with no one to separate you as I have done!" —"Hannah, you may leave this world before me, but I shall not tarry here long after. Ludovic Oswald has both our prayers. Oh! say with me—'May God forgive him all his transgressions!'"—"I have said that prayer many thousand times, and it shall be my last—'May God forgive my Ludovic!'—Oh! friends, what is this?—where are you?—let me hear you speak! Put my boy into my bosom!"

Margaret lifted up little Ludovic on the bed, and he of his own accord crept close to his mother's breast. She feebly folded her thin arms about her child—with a convulsive motion drew his little rosy lips to hers, and, with several long deep gasps, sighed out her life upon the cheeks which her dying spirit knew to be the innocent image of those of her guilty husband.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Mr Oswald carried the head of Hannah Blantyre to the grave; and, as she had been his son's wife, he did not bury her, according to the wish of her disconsolate and remorseful heart, in a remote corner, damp and weedy, but on the same slope where the dead of his own family reposed. No stone was raised, but the decent heap, as soon as the winter snow melted away, would be covered in its verdure with primroses and daisies, and visited by the cheerful sunshine. Margaret Lyndsay had taken a look at the grave; and although

she was resigned to the will of God, perhaps she envied the rest of that bed, and would have fain shut her eyes in the darkness of the narrow chamber. But such delusive dreams of melancholy soon pass away; for the soul within us remembers that it never can die, and that this life is but a portion of the awful life to come. It therefore turns away from the dust, and, thinking on its duties and obligations, which can never be annulled, it draws near unto living humanity, and yearns again for the light of smiles, however dim, and for the sound of voices, however plaintive. Margaret had not suffered her heart wholly to die within her—love still dwelt there for others' sorrows, terrible as had been her own; and when Lucy came over one night to Nether-Place, and said, "Oh! Margaret, come with me, for my father's mind is troubled more than he can well bear," she accompanied her dear friend to the Manse, and promised to stay a few weeks there till Mr Oswald might become more composed, and be again fit to be seen, and able to go to church.

The truth was, that Mr Oswald, on the first blow of this calamity, fearing that it might utterly kill Margaret, had so delivered up his whole feelings to her alone, and her most pitiable condition, that he had, in a great measure, excluded from his heart many gnawing thoughts about his most miserable son. The guilt was black and cruel, and its victim was before the eyes of the criminal's father, in all her beauty, innocence, helplessness, and desertion. Anger even hardened Mr Oswald's heart against his son; and when anger could not sustain itself, moral indignation came to his aid. A demand was made on all the tenderness and love and pity in his nature, by the uncomplaining and resigned sadness of her, most forlorn; and, as if it were all necessary to hold up her head from the bed of sickness and death, he gave it all, and was still unsatisfied with the measure of his own bounty. When he saw her ministering to the dying woman, who had so fatally changed to her all the appearances and realities of this world, the sense of her Christian goodness was sublime and supporting; and in the fervour of her prayers for the poor creature, often unable to pray for herself, Mr Oswald had felt his whole being strengthened against the assault of his own sorrows. But, after the funeral of Hannah Blantyre, the Manse was once more silent and quiet. Margaret Lyndsay was not there—and then Ludovic's voice was heard in his father's sleeping and waking dreams; and sadness, horror, and despair, at last fell upon the old man, and he would sit still for hours, or keep walking about the house from room to room, without any object, and weeping like a child. Poor Lucy was unable to bear such a sight, and had therefore beseeched Margaret, who needed no beseeching, to come and live for a while at the Manse.

Her very presence produced a change upon Mr Oswald. When she and Lucy were seen by his sunk and hollow eyes, sitting quite happy together, at least so they seemed, his thoughts were prevented by that sight from running into horrible dreams of Ludovic's present or future lot. Margaret believed that Ludovic had gone away to some foreign country; but she hoped and believed that his life would

be spared. That belief supported her; for, had she known that misery had killed him, her love was too great to have borne such knowledge. Sometimes she told her father not utterly to despair of seeing his son again—that he had long mourned him formerly as one that was dead—but that he had once returned, and might do so once more. Sad conversations were these to hold; but the very communion of fear, and hope, and love, alike inextinguishable in all their hearts, imparted, day by day, additional tranquillity to the sufferers. In a short time Mr Oswald grew less restless and agitated, and began to speak of returning to the discharge of his sacred functions.

According as Margaret saw her father's mind more composed, did her own placid resignation become more steadfast. In her lonely room at Nether-Place, with none to comfort her but that affectionate domestic, whose heart was almost broken by such misery, she had often given way to despair, and almost forgotten both mercy and judgment. Such solitude would soon have killed her; and indeed a few weeks had seemed to add more than as many years to her age. But in the Manse, cheering and being cheered, kneeling down morning and evening with them who partook all in one love and one affliction, and never left unguarded against the temptations of sorrow, she wondered how she could yet feel so much desire of life! As her heart became less sad, it grew more and more hopeful; and at last she almost dared to pray that God would send her husband back to her bosom. For her husband he might yet be—false and wicked no more; and in her heart neither could her own wrongs nor his sins destroy or impair love strong as life. With a sick shudder of hopelessness would she sometimes turn away from such vain dreams. But still they rose and disappeared; and whether she strove against them or not, they came upon her in the darkness of solitary midnight, and sometimes in the meridian brightness of the companioned day. "Oh, Margaret! where, where is our Ludovic at this moment? If I knew that, my soul might find rest!" And to such passionate starts of paternal affection, Margaret could often make no other reply but sighs and tears.

The frost and snow had almost all melted away under a few days' thaw, and very early in the year there was something like a soft vernal feeling in the sunshine that lighted up the Sabbath on which Mr Oswald was, for the first time after his affliction, to meet his congregation. The kirk was only a few hundred yards from the Manse, and as it had been known over all the parish that their own venerated minister was to appear again in his pulpit, Mr Oswald, who had been standing for some minutes at the window of his study, saw hundreds of his worthy friends, young and old, collecting together—many from the farthest uplands. The bell began to ring; and when the time came that he was to walk towards the kirk, his heart almost failed within him; but Margaret and Lucy were in the parlour, and their faces restored his resolution. As they entered the little gate of the churchyard, the elder at the plate, a very old man, took his minister by the hand, and in a low voice, and few words,

called down the "peace of God, which passeth all understanding," on his head, and on the heads of all his children. As their minister passed on, affection, pity, gratitude, and veneration, regarded him from every side, with such looks as made his heart strong as a rock. The bell ceased, and Mr Oswald's white hairs were once more seen in the house of God. He sat for a little while in the pulpit, looking around him with a benign countenance; and many were the wet eyes eagerly fixed upon him as he arose, and, with a clear and steady voice, said, "Let us worship God, by singing to his praise the fourth psalm from the beginning:

> 'Give ear unto me when I call,
> God of my righteousness;
> Have mercy, hear my prayer; thou hast
> Enlarged me in distress,'" &c.

The sweet voice of Margaret Lyndsay, who on this Sabbath sat beside her sister in her father's seat, was heard in the psalm. She did not veil her face, nor hang down her head, but she sat there meekly and humbly; and rude and simple as that country congregation was, not an eye was turned upon her in the stare of unfeeling curiosity, but the worship of God went on undisturbed as on ordinary occasions. Margaret stood up with the rest during the time of prayer—and her face was then, no doubt, seen by many: but a face so pale, so sad, so resigned, so faded, and so beautiful, touched every one who looked with a feeling that almost made them turn away their eyes, or put up their hands to wipe away their tears. As Mr Oswald felt strongly the holy influence of the place and of the worship, his soul threw off all lingering weakness, and he kindled into even more than his usual simple and fervent eloquence. So at least his congregation thought, for their hearts were full, and gave meanings to every word.

In his concluding prayer, he did not fear to trust himself, standing up publicly before God, with a supplication for his son. Then, indeed, the father's voice faltered—his countenance changed, the tears were seen falling down big and fast over his furrowed cheeks—and he stopped for a little while in the prayer. There was a deep hush—and Margaret Lyndsay sat down with many audible sobbings. But the old man soon found utterance for his love—and he called upon the Intercessor, that the soul of his son might not be suffered to perish. At these words Margaret rose up, half leaning on her sister Lucy, and had strength to continue so all the time of prayer.

Divine worship was over, and the congregation dismissed. Margaret Lyndsay walked slowly with Lucy out of the churchyard, and even stopped to address more than one of her scholars, and their parents. But no one advanced to meet her of their own accord, or sought to attract her notice; for they all felt awed by the solemnity of Mr Oswald's prayer, and by her own sacred resignation. They stood aloof in that reverent feeling, which the sight of great distress greatly endured awakens in every good heart; nor did Margaret Lyndsay misunderstand their behaviour. It was a relief to her swelling heart to see such kindness prevailing over the whole con-

gregation; above all, she rejoiced in the strength of Mr Oswald's spirit, for which she had now no longer any dismal fears, and followed by blessings, the father and his daughters returned to the Manse, which they did not again leave that Sabbath—for Mr Oswald had made a great exertion, and his elders respectfully insisted on there being no afternoon sermon. That determination was soon known to the congregation—some continuing to sit in the kirk—some standing in the sunniest part of the churchyard—some taking refreshment in the small village public-house—some in the cottages of friends, and some strolling down the little dells, till they should again hear the bell—while a few families, who lived most remote, had, immediately after service, set out on their homeward journey.

CHAPTER XLV.

From that day, as if a promise of peace had descended from heaven into Mr Oswald's spirit, was he gradually restored almost to his former self; and before spring Margaret Lyndsay returned to live at Nether-Place. She visited her father and sister every day; and meeting with all her former friends, sometimes on her walks to the Manse, and every Sabbath at church, she once more had heartfelt satisfaction in their presence. No doubt, a deep and incurable wound was in her bosom; and never again could she enjoy that deep delight in life which had been hers for so many years. A new existence, too, had enclosed her for a few short months, when she slept on the breast of Ludovic Oswald, believing him a man truly penitent for past sins, and thenceforth disposed to walk before God all his days. That blessed dream was gone for ever; but still Margaret could have been happy, deserted as she was, and also disgraced (although the disgrace before man was felt to be but of short duration), could she have but known that Ludovic was not dead—nor yet very wretched. But the utter darkness in which his life or death was hidden, it was hard to think of in her solitude: and sometimes, when she suffered herself to meditate on all the possibilities of his doom, in spite of religion she was like one distracted, and shut her Bible with a groan of unmitigable agony—agony that feared not so to give itself vent, even to the known displeasure of God.

We say that the wretched are forgetting their wretchedness when they are seen mingling again with their fellow-creatures—taking some part in the concerns of life—speaking as they used to do—smiling—laughing even—and seeking indulgence in human emotions. But how little do we know rightly of one another's inner life! One single solitary hour witnessed accidentally—one confidential letter to a bosom friend perused—one confession wrung out by a sudden pang—one melancholy tear that glistens for the irredeemable past—can change our opinion of the state of a fellow creature, and render him

all at once in our eyes an object of the most affecting interest, who had long been regarded perhaps with dislike or indifference. Margaret Lyndsay's appearance was such that almost every one in the parish thought that she was nearly as happy as ever. But it is well that we cannot penetrate into each other's hearts. Resigned as she was, and perfectly submissive to her Maker, except in short paroxysms of despair, Margaret Lyndsay, in her deplorable widowhood, was often sick of the burden of life; and having lost all her natural cheerfulness, she was herself sensible of sinking deeper and deeper every day into a settled melancholy.

This decline, however, both of body and mind, was so gradual, that it did not attract the notice even of Mr Oswald or Lucy. On the contrary, they both mistook Margaret's more still and noiseless demeanour for more perfect placidity, and believed that she had finally found rest. But poor old Mysie, who had no sufferings of her own to blind her, and no other human being in this world to care for but her young mistress, saw with other eyes, and knew that grief was sending Margaret Lyndsay towards the grave. Often, often the kind creature spoke without being heard; and sometimes Margaret forgot altogether that she was in the room, and vented such sighs—or perhaps a word or two—as pierced her to the heart. Mysie dreaded that her mistress was in a consumption; and in that fear she contrived to write a letter, not very legible, and no doubt strangely spelled, to Miss Wedderburne. That excellent young lady had been lately relieved from the labours of love to her parent. Mrs Wedderburne was dead; and Margaret's first friend and benefactress being now able to leave home, lost no time, after receiving Mysie's letter, in going to Nether-Place. She had known all that had happened—but no friendship can call away a good daughter from the bedside of a dying mother.

Miss Wedderburne did more good to her unfortunate friend than all the physicians in the world could have done; for she diffused the healing of peace through every vein, and into her very heart. That heart had begun to stagnate in solitary sorrow; its beatings had gone on within a bosom indifferent to life; and the disease, finding itself unopposed, had gained ground every day, and ere long would have been beyond the reach of human skill. But now Margaret Lyndsay felt as if warmed by the sunshine, and refreshed with the balmy breezes of former days, when all her tears had been for others—none for herself; when, if she lay down in grief, she rose up in joy, and was even happy in spite of her own tender and pitying soul, and of all the severest dispensations of Providence. Remembering what she once had been, she began to think what she might yet be! It was Miss Wedderburne who had instructed her mind and her heart—had raised her out of ignorance, and poverty, and hardship—and opened her eyes clearer and farther on into the nature of this life. Once more that benefactress was at her side! With her own hands did she dry up the tears of one who had long been an orphan, and was now worse than a widow; and in a few days, Mysie, who humbly kept at her own occupations, but who watched her mistress with

keenly observant eyes almost every hour, began to hum cheerfully at her work, and attributed the preservation of Margaret's life to the beautiful lady from Edinburgh.

Margaret feared every day that Miss Wedderburne would be bidding her farewell; but, instead of that, she proposed sending for Harriet and Frances to Nether-Place. "If you do that, and my dear girls come to see me, I care not if, when you all go away together, that hour be my last."—"Nay, nay, my beloved Margaret, you must not speak so; the future is indeed dark, but God has never forsaken you in any of your trials. Will you write to Harriet and Frances yourself, and I will add a postscript and address your letter?" In short, the two young, affectionate, and grateful girls lost no time in coming to Nether-Place; and on the night of their arrival, when Margaret Lyndsay went into their room after they had gone to bed, as she had always done when she had charge of them of old, and kissed their cheeks, she almost forgot her miseries, and shed tears of happiness. That night she fell asleep in the fulness of quiet joy; and with no ghastly dreams that she could remember, she rose in the morning incapable of misery, and touched with something like the gladness of her light-hearted youth. For although she had yet seen only her twenty-second summer, she often thought, on recounting to herself all the sorrows she had seen and suffered, that her life must have been a long one; and sometimes she even felt old, in the languor and exhaustion of her whole being. But now Miss Wedderburne, Harriet, and Frances, would not let her be miserable; and she sometimes even upbraidingly asked herself how she could thus forget Ludovic Oswald? Never, never did she forget him; but she was forced to reap the fruit of her own innocence and piety; and God had brought her three comforters, before the light of whose smiles, and the music of whose voices, despondency and despair could not live, but died away like the phantasms of feverish sleep.

Margaret Lyndsay had not a heart in which friendships alternated, displacing each other according to a power given to them by circumstances; but affection, once implanted there, lived on and grew for ever. She took Miss Wedderburne, Harriet, and Frances to the Manse, and deep and strong common feelings at once united all there together in a sure love. There was nothing vain, fantastic, morbid, extravagant, or flighty in their affection. It rose out of the best emotions of their nature; and each loved the other as well, at first sight, as if they had been sisters meeting after separation from earliest infancy, and one father embracing them all in his arms. Mr Oswald felt even a pride in Margaret—although it might have been thought that such a feeling could not soon have risen up among so many sad recollections—when he saw how tenderly and respectfully she was treated by such a woman as Miss Wedderburne, and how enthusiastically she was beloved by Harriet and Frances; while simple Lucy, to whom all jealousy was unknown, was lavish of her admiration, but still thought that not one of them all was equal to Margaret Lyndsay.

To raise up Margaret's heart to a still happier composure, letters

came from Laurence, now in the Indian seas. He was well, and full of animating hopes. Thus intrenched among the holiest feelings of nature, she looked, and indeed was, happy: her thoughts of Ludovic were, without any effort of her mind, less and less appalling; and it did not now seem so wild and mad a thing to hope that he might return. "If he be alive, he will hear about me some day!"—And then Margaret knew well that he loved her, which he indeed did with all his miserable heart, and that knowledge of itself was strength. But then, "what if he be dead, and year after year waste away, till I go to the grave, without hearing one word about my Ludovic? Or, alas! what if I some day know that he is dead? and something that belonged to him be brought to prove that the corpse was that of my beloved husband?"

CHAPTER XLVI.

About midsummer Margaret lost her friends, who parted from her with that reluctance which kind hearts feel to leave a dear object, to whom they know full well that their presence is a blessing. But their own duties called them away; and Margaret gave them a promise to visit them in Edinburgh towards the close of autumn. She longed to take a look at Braehead, and to walk down the lane where her mother and sisters died. Her life there had not faded from her remembrance, although all its scenes of happiness or distress were softened in the distance; and with difficulty could she sometimes believe that she was the same person with the girl who, in the midst of all her trials, had fallen asleep the moment she laid herself down on her chaff-bed, and felt cheerful in the morning light, notwithstanding all the deaths that had taken away, one by one, all whom she loved. Nether-Place was again solitary; and although, for some time after the departure of Miss Wedderburne and her sweet sisters, it was also most melancholy, yet Margaret felt that the influence of that affection remained, and that she was now far stronger in mind and heart than before, and secured against the assaults, if not of despondency, certainly of despair.

Nether-Place was, by its situation, most retired; and the few footpaths that had crept up during the lapse of years through the farm, from adjacent houses, had, by common consent of the inhabitants, fallen into disuse since Margaret's extraordinary affliction. No person walked by the house in idleness; and few that could well help it, even on business. The summer was an exceedingly rich one, and the foliage of the trees broad, deep, and dark. Many glimpses of the country round about were excluded—the avenue was as dim in the middle of the day as it had formerly been towards the evening; and the black cloud of crows that kept wheeling about the old elm-grove, was almost the only motion or sound about Nether-Place.

Margaret Lyndsay, in her blighted youth, led as recluse a life as Daniel Craig had done; but in that seclusion she did not forget her fellow-creatures in distress. Charity dwelt in that solitude; and some who now saw her face only on the Sabbath-day, felt her goodness all the week through; and on blessing the bread she gave, implored God to be with her in her exceeding great affliction. She was not buried in grief—her heart was alive as ever—and had she not done so much good her resignation had not been so complete; for God had given her the means of benefiting her fellow-creatures, and in employing them she unconsciously solaced her own griefs. She did all the good she could—and that made her happy.

She was sitting one warm still evening, just about sunset, in the willow-arbour, when she saw Michael Grahame approaching. She was happy, indeed, to receive a visit from one who she feared had been too ill to leave home, and took his hand with the pressure of sisterly affection. Sometimes it had crossed her mind that Michael had once loved her too tenderly, and that her marriage must have made him sad. There was more than even Christian regard for her happiness expressed by his melancholy voice on that night when she had told him of her love for Ludovic Oswald; and during the few months they had lived together, he had not once come to Nether-Place. Neither had he done so since the miserable event, although she knew from Mr Oswald that he had made constant inquiries about her welfare, sometimes at the Manse, and always when visited at Lamington-Braes. Margaret now was much afflicted by seeing him so like a shadow; for slow consumption had been at its work for a year nearly, since last she saw him, and Michael Grahame was manifestly marked out for his grave before the leaves, now green, should be yellow in the tinge of autumn.

They sat down in the arbour; and no doubt they both remembered well the last time they had sat there, and all their conversation. Michael took her hand now into his, with that privilege which a dying man feels towards a friend most tenderly beloved. Margaret felt tears rushing in; for she had loved Michael Grahame always; and now her affection for him was deepened and sanctified by the fear of death. She held his warm and feverish hand in both of hers; she kept her tearful eyes fixed affectionately upon his face; and, when he raised up her arm to his lips and kissed it, she took it not away—but quieted the soul of him who knew his days were nearly numbered by every tenderest expression of spiritual love. She knew well to whom she was speaking, looking, sighing, weeping; and there was no reason why she should not soothe the soul of the dying man.

"Margaret, you have been the greatest blessing of my short life. Till I became your friend, I knew nothing—except in imagination—of the nature of a woman's soul. Your purity, piety, and sinlessness—if such a word may be used of a human being—have made me almost fearless of death. Thinking of you, I know the soul to be immortal." Margaret looked at him almost with a disturbed countenance; but she could say nothing—for a hectic flush was on his cheeks,

and his eyes burned with the fire of that fatal disease. "Oh Michael, Michael, your words are not fitting for me to hear, kind as they are; for I am, in truth, a sinful creature—full of frailties, and oppressed with grief. But let us not sit longer here; for, warm as the summer days are, the evenings are often cold, and you are not in a condition to stand the chill air." But the youth rose not; and Margaret continued sitting by his side. "Margaret Lyndsay, I once loved you—as dust loves dust—and no heaven could I think of but that of your breast. You saw me a lonely, sickly, silent man, nor thought when I came into your presence, or when I left it; but I cared not. I knew I was not to live long, and bliss enough it was for me to hear you speak—to see you smile on others—and sometimes, too, on me—for you were always gentle to me, and every word you ever spoke do I remember now, and will I remember till the clay is upon my lips. Do not weep, Margaret; for hopeless, desperate, and even impious as my love was, still I was happy. Had it not been for my love, I should have been dead ere this of very weariness of heart, worn out by incessant pain, and a sickness that only the consumptive know."

Margaret knew well that it was a dying man who thus spoke to her; and she felt that it would be cruel to stop his words. She therefore sought to inspire him with more cheerful thoughts about himself, and, varying their conversation, to assure him that many a one as far gone in consumption as he was had recovered and lived for many long years. "I do not wish it—I am nearly prepared to die; many agitating fears have I passed through—doubts and perplexities, and sore distress of the baffled understanding; but now I believe—and when my hour comes I shall die in Christ." He looked so faint—so destitute of all strength—so utterly languid, that Margaret feared her friend would die that very hour, and an awful sympathy came over her spirit. "Oh! Margaret Lyndsay, my beautiful and my beloved, will you hear words of comfort from my lips? Methinks I see into the future, and that happiness is yet in store for you. Ludovic Oswald will return—it is my clear and deep conviction that he will; and he and you, as husband and wife, will yet be happy. Oh! that I could see you reunited, and then be released." A sacred fervour kindled his speech, and he kissed Margaret's forehead. "Thou art my sister, and I may yet kiss that angelical brow in heaven. I cannot get rid of earthly ties yet—I cannot be insensible, while I breathe, of thy beauty—oh! give me one lock of that soft, bright, auburn hair, that I may have it with me in my coffin. Will you give it to me, Margaret?—it is my first and last request." Margaret Lyndsay gave it to him; and with hands all covered over with blue veins, and little more than bones, Michael Grahame put the tress into his bosom, over which, in a few weeks, was to be drawn the winding-sheet. "Margaret! that was an earthly thought—an earthly request. But I am yet under the dominion of the dust; and even this little lock of hair will comfort me when I may be lying on my deathbed in my poor mother's house. She is a simple, uneducated woman, and in her solitariness will sorely miss

me, who have long been her only joy—her only grief. Need I say that, when I am gone, I hope you will pay a visit now and then to the widow and the childless, and, as you cross Lamington-Braes, think of your friend Michael Grahame. Here, Margaret, is a keepsake—the Bible that I have carried about with me for several years. I have written a few words on a blank page. If ever you and Ludovic Oswald are married, read to your husband from this Bible." Margaret took the Bible from his hand, and wet it with her tears; but Mr Oswald was now seen approaching, and she felt herself relieved from an almost insupportable weight of mournful emotions. Michael Grahame, too, at sight of his venerable friend, recovered his composure, and saluted him with his customary gentle manner. Mr Oswald had not seen Michael for a good many weeks, and could with difficulty hide his feelings on the great visible change.

They sat silent for a while, till Michael Grahame again began to speak on the subject nearest and dearest to his lingering spirit. Mr Oswald, under the power of his voice, sat enchained like a very child, and heard every word of hope about his son Ludovic with a credulous heart. "I know that your son, with all his sins, would not destroy himself. No, no; never, never. He is alive at this moment somewhere, and, in God's good time, will return a penitent, and you will all yet be happy. I seem to have a prophetic intimation of his return." Mr Oswald looked attentively on the poor youth, and he saw that he was under the influence of fever—not such a fever as confuses and clouds the brain, but excites all internal perceptions into an extraordinary degree of vividness. But still he knew not how to stop a conversation so painfully affecting to them all; when footsteps were heard coming along the gravel walk, and a man, in part dressed like a soldier, stood beside them, and pulling off his hat, took a letter out of it, and gave it to Mr Oswald. "A forced march—thirty-three miles in a hot summer-day. Please, sir, or madam—to wet my whistle a bit or so. I want a couple of toes on the right foot forwards—frostbitten in that damned Holland.—Beg your pardon, sir, for swearing; but I am as thirsty as the devil himself." The messenger saw that he had brought strong tidings, and abruptly turning about, walked towards the house. Mr Oswald let the letter drop out of his hand, and Margaret, suddenly struck with a dreadful hope, seized it, and had sight enough to know the handwriting of him so long wept over, and bewailed as dead, or worse than dead. "It is from my husband—from my Ludovic—from your son!" And with these words, she lay down upon her father's bosom.

Michael Grahame took the letter, and asked if he should read it, and tell them what it contained? He did so; and they now knew that Ludovic, who thought himself at the point of death, was lying at Edinburgh, in an hospital.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Mr Oswald and Margaret arrived in Edinburgh on the forenoon of the day after they had received Ludovic's letter; and, first of all, they went to the house of Miss Wedderburne. With a joyful countenance did she welcome them; nor, in her earnest embrace, was she aware of the sore agitation that shook and convulsed the frame of her beloved friend. But few words were necessary to explain all that was yet known; and then they sat down in strong suspense of emotion, one and all of them awed by the hope and fear that were soon to be changed either into bliss or misery. Both Mr Oswald and Margaret were, however, much cheered by the deep sympathy expressed by so excellent a person in their present trial, and agreed to take the refreshment which, after so troubled and sleepless a night, and so long and dismal a journey, was requisite both for body and soul. Indeed, they were afraid to go to the melancholy place where they knew one so dear was lying; and Margaret, although long accustomed to sorrow, was so overpowered, that her frame was unable to support itself, and she lay down on the sofa, almost in the bosom of her friend. "My brother Richard is in the house," said Miss Wedderburne;—"allow him to go first and inquire about the patient. To see you restored to each other will be indeed to him a delightful sight." Margaret was thinking too mournfully of Ludovic to feel almost any emotion at the name of her former lover; but still she looked as if it must not be that he should interest himself so in such a crisis. Miss Wedderburne observed her delicacy even in her utmost distress, and whispered to her: "Richard is quite happy now. He esteems—admires—venerates—loves you still; but thank God, all his griefs are at an end, and he is in no long time to be married to one almost as worthy of him as my own Margaret." These words were a relief to vague apprehensions passing through her heart, and in a few minutes Margaret sat up stronger and more composed; and when Richard Wedderburne entered the room, received him as a friend who possessed, indeed, her utmost regard and sisterly affection. He heard the sad tale with manifest agitation, and offered his services with all the warmth of his generous nature. But Mr Oswald and Margaret felt that there must be no witnesses at such a meeting: so did their friends; and now they left the house, promising to return as soon as possible, whatever might be the event, and walked along the busy streets to the Infirmary.

They had both made up their hearts for the worst, as far as human hearts, that by their constitution live on the breath of hope, can ever be made up to the certain conviction of evil yet unknown. The grey melancholy walls of the building, that contained so much sickness, sorrow, and decay, almost struck still the beatings of their pulse, when they entered within the gates of the court; the silence of the gloom was so deathlike, and such a general sadness on the faces of the few persons moving about from door to door, as if going from one dying bed to another. Mr Oswald was making some inquiries, confused and indistinct, in the agitation of a father's love, when an old

matron said,—"Follow me—you have been looked for—you are Mr Oswald?" She conducted them into a small room—almost a closet—and told them to sit down for a few minutes. They had not had time to speak a word of comfort to each other, when the door again opened, and a gentleman, advanced in life, and with a countenance remarkably mild and benignant, came in, saying with a smile, "Mr Oswald, your son will recover—I do not doubt it; all the worst symptoms are gone." Margaret was still sitting, and all she did was to bless God for His infinite mercy, in such a voice as greatly affected the humane physician, accustomed as he had been for so many years to ejaculations both of grateful thanksgiving and hopeless agony. "Your poor son has told me much of his story—he made me his confessor last night—and he has been removed to a room by himself, where you will find him better, I dare say, than you expected." They followed their kind conductor, and, gently opening a door at the end of a long silent passage, he bade them enter, and then went away, saying he would return in an hour.

Silently, as if walking in their sleep, Mr Oswald and Margaret put down their feet upon that floor, and they saw lying upon a bed one whom they could not have known to be their beloved Ludovic. He was supported upon pillows, so that the figure seemed to be nearly sitting up; and the eyes were closed as if it had been in death. He was not aware of an approach so noiseless; nor would he have heard even a heavy tread, for his soul had been wearied and worn-out within him by long endurance of pain, and especially by a wakeful night, in which he had lain, wondering, when his father came, what would be his reception of so profligate a son. A chair was at the bedside near his head, and on it his father sat down, while Margaret, afraid to disturb the sleeper, took her seat at his feet. There he lay, with no blood in his face—his cheeks sunk, and his lips white, and his arms laid by his side just like a corpse. But he breathed hardly, and that was the only symptom of life.

What a change was here, from that gay and gallant youth that, a year ago, in spite of all his wounds, was straight and stately, and had walked with the proud step of one who had been familiar with danger, and had led on brave spirits like himself in many a desperate enterprise! He was now feebler than a child—subdued by misery—utterly helpless—and unable, had the place been on fire, to rise up and escape from destruction. Frost and cold, and hunger and thirst, and weary marches and fierce onsets, had once been as nothing to Ludovic Oswald; but now sap and leaves were dried up and withered, and the trunk lying on the ground, decayed and eaten in unto the very core. "Oh! my son—my son!" was all his father could articulate; while she who had been his bride—his wife—could not look upon so sad a sight, and bowed down her head upon her lap, hiding her face with her hands, through which streamed in a torrent most bitter and rueful tears.

They sat thus long—very long—and uttered not a word. Yet they both tried to comfort themselves with the cheering intimation of that benevolent physician, and hoped, in spite of what they saw, that the figure might yet arise, and that the powers of life were not

utterly decayed. His father sat looking at him with his hands clasped, and his eyes frequently raised to heaven. Then would he gaze vacantly about the room, where everything was clean, orderly, and comfortable for the sick. No disturbing sound reached the chamber—no glaring light found its way through the curtains that darkened the window. Skill and humanity watched over the sick-room; but could they exclude death? Had his father and his wife been paying their last visit to the body forsaken by the soul, they could not have sat there in profounder silence, nor seemingly more remote from hope; but there was hope nevertheless, and they both saw the motion of his breast stirring the white sheet with which it was so decently covered.

The sick man now awoke, and opened his dim eyes, but they were fixed on vacancy, and saw nothing. His slumbers gradually dispersed; and at length he seemed to behold the figure at his feet. "My good nurse, will you give me that cup?" And at these words Margaret rose up, and stood fully before his soul. He knew her in a moment, and as he closed his eyes, pronounced her name. "Ludovic, Ludovic," said his father, "I and your own Margaret are both here; you sent for me, and I have come; nor would she whom once I thought I had for ever made your wife stay away. Oh! my dear boy, let me hear your voice. Blessed be God that I have seen this day, and that my first-born is yet alive!"

There were meek and tender embracings—tears shed that themselves knew not of—prayers silent in their hearts, and uttered in single words—sighs of love, and forgiveness, and gratitude—groans of penitence, remorse, and despair. "Oh, father! I have sinned against thee, and am no longer worthy to be called thy son: and have you come, indeed, Margaret, to the dying bed of that miserable sinner, who brought you to shame and ruin!"—"There was no shame, my Ludovic, with me, for God never forsook me. But where—where have you been this long long year?—and, alas! what cruel sufferings have brought you to such a place as this?"—"Will you kiss me, Margaret—once only, in presence of our father, before I am called away to judgment?" Margaret knelt down and leant over him, and kissed his brow often and often, and called him by every tender name that love could remember—names familiar to his ear during those few months when she had lain in delusion within his selfish and deceitful bosom. Margaret doubted not that he was a dying man, and strove in all the power of sacred affection to comfort the spirit which was about to pass away from earth.

"I am weak and faint, and cannot speak; but tell me, I beseech you, how you have been since that day on which I left you, in guilt, shame, and despair?" Margaret, who was now more composed than his father, told him that they had both been resigned and happy; and that, had they known where he had gone, or if he were alive, that they would have been contented with their lot. She also told him of Hannah Blantyre's death, and of the welfare of his little boy, now in the Manse. All was strange, humiliating, miserable, to this guilty

man. "Poor Hannah, then, is dead!—But, Margaret, she was false to me, and that may be some alleviation of my guilt."—"Ludovic, your wife is in her grave—your father and I saw her die; and, whatever may have been her sins, in this I believe her innocent. But, oh! Ludovic, what thoughts are these, that now they should be spoken of! I came here to comfort and bring peace. I was your wife once, but all earthly ties are now as nothing, and I devoutly trust that now you have a new heart." The dying man, for such he seemed to be, strove to hide his face, but he could not; for his feeble arm again fell down motionless by his side. "I have been in Jamaica; and was wounded fighting in the woods against the Maroons. Sent home and discharged—for I was a private soldier as before—I came down to Edinburgh, and found myself, I do not know how, in the Infirmary. I hope that I have repented; but, oh! I do not feel that I am pardoned, for God does not hear my prayers! Pray for me, Margaret—pray for me, father; and then I may trust in the mercy of Heaven."

They both knelt down by the bedside, and his father prayed. Margaret held his emaciated hand in hers, and pressed it to her lips. Religion had been for too many years estranged from the heart of Ludovic Oswald. Even in his happiness he had not lived in obedience to her laws; and in his misery hers was a frowning face, upon which he feared to look. But disease had tamed his heart, and opened it to that voice whose warnings had so long been despised. And now it was his own father who was praying, and whom he had ever loved with a holy fear. His fellow-creatures had forgiven him; and that almost encouraged him to hope that he might receive forgiveness from his Creator.

But now the hour was gone, and the physician came into the room. Familiar as he had been from his youth with the most melancholy shows of life and death, his countenance now wore, with all its sincere pity and compassion, almost an air of cheerfulness; and that expression, contrasted although it was so strongly with that on the other faces, yet was not without comfort to them all. "Come, come," said he, "we must not suffer our patient to take too much of this medicine, pleasant as it is. You must leave him for a few hours at least to himself—or to a very different nurse from your daughter, sir; an old fat woman, fond of tea and a mountain of buttered toast, and who will sleep as soundly and snore as sonorously in that armchair yonder as a very trooper." So Mr Oswald took his son almost cheerfully by the hand, and said, "Ludovic, my dear son, keep up your heart—our friend here says you are in the fair way of recovery—and I do not fear in a fortnight to take you with me to the Manse." Margaret again kissed him with many tears, and whispered consoling words close to his cheek, so that a faint smile came across his face; and when his father and Margaret again looked towards him as they were leaving the room, he seemed to them both not nearly so deathlike as an hour before, and they left him with hopes of his recovery so strong that they were afraid to feel them in their hearts, lest they might prove all false at last.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

The punishment of guilt had fallen heavy on Ludovic Oswald, and remorse had been his companion night and day, on shipboard, in the tumult of soldiers' quarters, and on desperate service against savage men in the woods. His whole character had been broken up, and misery lived among its ruins. His love for Margaret Lyndsay had been deep and true, and he had, in order to possess her, madly broken sacred oaths, and subjected her whole future life to probable ignominy and wretchedness. Even when she had lain, in her innocence, beauty, and affection, within his bosom, remorse had gnawed at his heart; and even she, his lovely and loving bride, could not, with her soft bosom, appease the rage of that hungry fiend. But, on the very hour that his infatuated crime had been brought to light, and ruin stared them all in the face, he had been driven out from the home he had profaned, with the audible curse of God ringing in his ears, and had striven to harden himself to self-destruction. But his nature recoiled from that hideous act, and he sailed as a soldier to the West Indies. Often had he wished to write to his father, or to Margaret; but something always tore the pen out of his hand, and he feared to see their very names written down, after his horrid sacrilege. His guilt had been most unnatural, and inexpiable; and he saw no refuge but in shipwreck, or death in battle.

Every misery that man can endure, of mind and body, had been his; and when at last he had reached Edinburgh, that he might know something about his father and Margaret before he died, he had fallen down on the street, and after being looked at by many hundreds, collecting and dispersing again without meddling with him in his squalid swoon, he had been finally carried to the Infirmary. He had lain for several weeks delirious or insensible. He had many wounds, imperfectly cured; and the yellow fever had devoured his strength, that had once been able to cope, hand to hand, with the fiercest enemy. On recovering his reason, he tried in vain to hear something, however slight, of his friends at Casterton; and at last, thinking that he had but few days to live, he scrawled a short letter, and got a person almost as poor as himself to carry it to his father. That messenger knew Ludovic Oswald by another name, and so did the medical attendants. He lay in the common fever-ward, but that was a comfortable and quiet place compared with many others in which he had been, and he was almost reconciled to die as an unknown pauper. One of the physicians, however, had frequently spoken to him in a way that showed he suspected Ludovic to be the son of a gentleman, and, on the evening after he had despatched the letter to his father, the unfortunate man whispered to him what had been his birth and parentage; and what visit he hoped. In consequence of this, he had been removed into the room where that interview had taken place.

Everything that skill and humanity could do, had been done to Ludovic in that hospital; but how could his father, or Margaret, or

their friends, bear the thoughts of his lying another night within its walls? The weather was mild, warm, and almost without a breath of air; so in the evening the patient was laid in a litter, and carried, without disturbance or pain, to the house of Miss Wedderburne. There he was laid on a bed of down, and in a room as silent as if he had been at Nether-Place. There his father and Margaret could watch by his bedside every hour, with nothing to impede, and everything to forward the ministration of devoted affection. Every foot in the house touched the floors lightly as a leaf, not a bell was rung, and doors opened and shut unheard. A heavenly calm fell upon the sick man—a calm broken only by the voices of his father or his Margaret, more deeply charged with tones of love than if he had never sinned, and been thus miserably brought low by guilt! No doubt Margaret's face and frame both seemed changed to his eyes; but well did he know that his own wickedness had made that sweet bosom pine away, and had even mixed the auburn of her hair with some threads of untimely grey. But although there were many symptoms of sorrow and suffering about his Margaret, there was not one of anger or unforgiveness; her looks, motions, smiles, tears, and words, were all loving as loving might be, and told the dying man that her whole soul would go with him into his grave. Often did he fear to look towards his father's face; but his dim eyes turned of their own accord to Margaret, for there was no stern, no austere, no upbraiding expression on her countenance—nothing but a pale gentle smile, that quieted even his apprehensions of a world to come.

On that night, after Ludovic had fallen asleep, his father and Margaret sat in the drawing-room, almost cheerfully, with Richard Wedderburne and his three sisters. The elegance of their whole demeanour was now made more delightful by the overflowing of compassion, pity, and love. To Margaret they behaved as they had always done, for she was one of themselves; but the delicacy of their attentions to Mr Oswald affected, and at the same time elevated, her heart more than all their tenderness to herself; and in that compassionate respect to the white head of the aged, Richard Wedderburne was now conspicuous. With what pure, profound, and tender gratitude did Margaret now look upon him who had once been her lover! And with what a calm and undisturbed eye did he regard her, now that time and reason had freed him from vain and misplaced passion, and left him at liberty to admire and love still the beautiful being who had so innocently distracted years of his life! The whole conversation, slightly varying in its mood, under the calm fluctuation of common feelings, still bore upon one unhappy yet melancholy subject; despondency and fear, as often as they arose, sank away beneath so many encouraging smiles and voices; and when Margaret retired to her bedroom, it was with a strong spirit of hope, that entered into her prayers.

It was the same room in which she had slept during the most undisturbed part of her life, when, snatched from poverty and obscure distress, she had been admitted into the very bosom of the most

enlightened happiness, and made one of a family distinguished, in the possession of all temporal advantages, by every Christian virtue. She felt now enclosed by all peaceful thoughts; and, along with softened remembrances of the past, came brighter hopes of the future. Within the walls of this one house were almost all she dearly loved, and they were all lying in silence and sleep. She looked from her window into the clear night; and those beautiful meadows, where she had so often walked in joy with Frances and Harriet, were all reposing in the moonlight. Over the tops of the groves her heart sailed onwards to Brachead, and saw a confused vision of that her early habitation. The dead were there alive, and voices heard that had for years been silent in the dust. Like the songs of an angel, swelling in the starry heaven, were now the remembered tones of blind Esther's voice, hymning beside her mother's knees. And love, which, as well as fear, peoples the night with phantoms, brought the image of that mother close to her side, till she almost started to behold the visible presence of one who could now be embraced but in a dream. These were Margaret's waking thoughts before she lay down on the once accustomed bed; and they brightened into still more overwhelming bliss in the mysterious, incomprehensible, and incommunicable world of sleep.

Day after day Ludovic's appearance was less ghastly and death-like; and no one now but himself had any doubts of his recovery. The same physician who had been so kind to him in the Infirmary attended him still, and assured Mr Oswald that his son might live many years, although he never could again enjoy strong health. But that assurance was enough to satisfy his father's heart, and to fill it with gratitude. Escaped at last from all the troubles of the world, his repentant son would become fitter for heaven in the thoughtful progress of years, which he knew could not be very many; Nether-Place would yet be the abode of peace and tranquillity; and his own Manse be as happy as ever, when Ludovic and Margaret were again husband and wife. Such were the thoughts that occupied the old man's reviving heart; but he did not hint them to his son, for as yet Ludovic had no hope of life; and preparation for death makes the days of them worth more who have unexpectedly received first reprieve and then a pardon.

His father and Margaret were sitting one evening as usual in his room, and comforting him in his despondency. "I do not wish to live; for after guilt like mine, it is impossible that even my father can forgive me, or love his son as before. Neither, Margaret, can you—oh! never, never!—love one who so inhumanly destroyed your peace. You pity me—I see that—for I am one of the wretched; but how can you ever love me any more? and without you what would be this life? I hope that I shall die." Mr Oswald knew not all that might have passed through Margaret's thoughts in her widowhood. Such guilt as that of his son had struck at the holiest affections of her nature, and reduced her at once to an almost hopeless prostration. Had no anger, no indignation, no bitter and rankling sense of unspeakable injury, penetrated her heart along with all

its sufferings, and hardened it against her betrayer? Would she give herself once more to that guilty and miserable man. Would she again leave the calm of resignation, and of a life divorced from agitating emotions, and become the wife of him in whose bosom she had found deceit even during that bridal happiness, which, with all human creatures, is held sacred and uncontaminated? But all such fears in a father's spirit were now to be done away, for Margaret knelt down by the bedside, and said, "My beloved Ludovic! my life was suddenly and terribly darkened for your sake; but never did my love sink in all my struggles—in all my agonies. You think that you are on your deathbed—and perhaps it may be so; for we are all blind, and the decrees of God are unsearchable. But here am I, willing to be your wife once more, even if it be but for a few melancholy days—here am I, with a heart fuller of love than it was even on that day when your father pronounced his benediction over us! If you are to die, let your last breath be drawn on the bosom of me your wife; and let my days afterwards, which then will not be long, be passed as your widow; so that our names may be on one tombstone, and our bodies be interred side by side, in hopes of a joyful resurrection!"

The pale and emaciated figure seemed animated with a stronger principle of hope; and tears, the first he had been able to weep, for anguish had dried them up, trickled down his cheeks. "Oh, Margaret, Margaret! was there ever love like unto this? Father, you have heard her words! Once did I, your miserable son, suffer you to bestow on us a fatal benediction. I am still a sinner, nor is true penitence mine; remorse alone tears me to pieces. But, as I am now on the brink of the grave, will you, father, reunite us on earth, that we may, by the mercy of God and his Son, meet in heaven?" Mr Oswald was happy to hear such humble words, and he knew that truth was then speaking within the supposed shadow of death. "Yes, my son, I will make Margaret Lyndsay your wife on earth; and if you obey her pure and holy heart, you need not despair of seeing her in heaven, where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, but to which mortal beings like us are led by the sanctity of earthly affections."

CHAPTER XLIX.

Mr Oswald did not return to his Manse till Margaret was his son's wife. They were sad but holy nuptials, yet a tinge of joy irradiated the mournful ceremonial. Miss Wedderburne, Harriet, and Frances, laid aside their weeds for that one day, and put on white marriage-garments. Lucy, of course, was not away; and Michael Grahame himself would have come if he could, but his last weakness now kept him to his bed. He sent them his joyful blessing.

Margaret, pale, thin, and weeping, stood by the bed of her husband, and held his hand, while his greyhaired father, with an unfaltering voice, once more joined their lives before Heaven. She stood there in the fulness of religious joy, for he who deemed himself on the verge of death, was now given into her care to prepare him by love for earth or heaven—for time or for eternity. Now she was Ludovic's wife again; and all her nature expanded in hope that God would spare her husband, and allow him some few years to prepare himself for that change so awful to all that are born.

Margaret had promised to visit Miss Wedderburne before the end of autumn, and thus affectingly and solemnly had her promise been fulfilled. Mr Oswald and Lucy returned to the Manse, but Ludovic was yet too ill to be removed. His wife watched him night and day. A couch was placed by his sick bed, in which she slept, or lay awake, alive to every sigh of pain or feverish anxiety. Happier far was she than any other bride in the whole world; and the same ring was now worn that she had kept after her marriage had been so miserably dissolved; the same locket was near her heart, containing Ludovic's hair, which he had given her when first he wooed her in her virgin beauty. With an angel thus dwelling for ever before his eyes, no wonder that he once more desired life; while his wife's virtue and piety, even in this life, had now met their best and dearest reward.

Mrs Oswald, for so Richard, Harriet, and Frances now called her, although Miss Wedderburne used still that of "Margaret Lyndsay," had several visits to pay before she and her husband returned to Nether-Place. She walked down the lane, and looked, not without tears, into the window of the small room in which she had once been so happy; in which her mother, Esther, and poor Marion had died. She went into several houses to see old friends. Some of these friends were dead, some gone elsewhere, but others she found, and none that were not happy to take hold of her hand. Some vague rumours of her strange misfortunes had reached this obscure byplace. But she told them that she was happy, and that her husband was recovering his health; and they asked no further questions. The portion of her life that had been passed here could never be cut off from her being, and all its tenderest remembrances rose before her like realities. God had not forsaken the Orphan.

Brachead had been in her dreams many thousand times, both during her period of perfect bliss—of utter misery—and of imperfect or complete resignation. But never had it appeared more beautiful, in the dreams either of bright or dim imagination, than it now was, when again shown to her eyes just as it existed, with no changes but those of time working silently in the seasons of years, or brought over it by the hands of men obeying the altered circumstances of their condition. Margaret had walked there alone, without even her friend Miss Wedderburne, and she had enjoyed the delight of re-perusing all its characters the same as they were before, or at least perplexing her with no violent erasures. She knew the bushes where the linnet had fed its young; the broom, of which she had formed garlands for

herself and her sisters; the little dells where they sat or played; the wood, into whose gloom they had feared to go far with their infant or girlish steps. Nor was the human life that breathed there in any respect painfully changed. In the quiet ongoings of that little world, there had no doubt been stoppage and decay; but most of the hearths burned as before; and the memory of her own family was not extinct. Honest John Walker, his wife and children, were still in their comfortable hut; and "Lord bless me, Margaret Lyndsay!" was a heartfelt salutation that came sweetly upon her ear. Mrs Walker set a chair for her with a smiling face; and, when she brought out homely refreshment, the bread was in a basket which blind Esther had made. Jessie Walker was now a pretty lassie of fifteen; and glad, and proud too, were her parents to agree that she should go with Mrs Oswald to Nether-Place as her friend and servant. A gentle mirth was over their tea-drinking, not disturbed by the recollections of the honest and kind-hearted master of the house, who had taken Margaret and her mother in his cart to Glasgow, when Walter Lyndsay was lying on his deathbed.

Margaret returned from Brachead with a heart strengthened by the remembrance of her early days, and carried with her into the mansion of Miss Wedderburne the sweet charities of humanity, which with her had been so long cherished and warmed by the fireside of a lowly cottage.

CHAPTER L.

Once more Nether-Place was inhabited by Ludovic Oswald and his wife. They arrived there quietly, and in the dusk of evening, and were welcomed home by their happy and devoted old domestic. But, in one single day, the news of their return spread over all the parish, and every heart was stirred with strong delight on such a restoration. It was almost like a rising from the dead; and the extraordinary circumstances of Ludovic's reappearance lost nothing in wonder from the awakened imaginations of his simple neighbours. The very remembrance even of his transgressions was swallowed up in the joy of knowing that he was alive, and to remain among them all the rest of his days; and although his friends were deterred by many thoughtful feelings from crowding in upon him at Nether-Place, yet the Manse was visited every hour of the day for several weeks, by young and old, congratulating their beloved and respected pastor. He did not shut himself up from their homely sympathies, but returned their visits at their own houses, and was seen walking about with Lucy every evening, with an expression of countenance that had been long unknown, and like the Mr Oswald of former times, glad, cheerful, and communicative, and ready to receive and give salutations to every one he met on footpath or highway.

Hilarity and joyousness were observable everywhere, and Casterton did not seem to hold within its bounds one person desponding or disconsolate.

A new life began at Nether-Place. Ludovic Oswald—the brave bold soldier—was an invalid—and was seen sometimes alone, but generally with his wife, walking slowly, and with feeble steps, over his fields, or towards the Manse. He was greatly broken down, and his wounds, never perhaps to be healed, made him look, at the early age of twenty-six, almost like a veteran of fifty. Margaret, too, had lost the elasticity of her steps, and the beautiful airy being moved now with matronly gait, and wore an expression of resigned melancholy that touched even the rudest mind. But every one who saw her felt assured that she was happy—happier than ever; and her smiles, when she accosted her kind neighbours, evidently came from a heart that calmly and deeply enjoyed the lot assigned her by Heaven. She did not forget one of her acquaintances, rich or poor; her charities flowed on silently as before; and neither her past misery, nor her present happiness, had extinguished one thought formerly awakened by the griefs or joys of her fellow-creatures.

The beautiful farm of Nether-Place was now in the hands of its proprietor. In youth he had known rural affairs; and now, in overlooking the peaceful labours of the field, and in planning improvements over his small estate, that mind found rest that had so long been disturbed by the sins, and sorrows, and sufferings of an agitated world. The pure air inspired fresh health, and made the current of his blood flow lightly on. Month after month his appearance became more like long life; and on each successive Sabbath he received the congratulations of his friends, who spoke not to deceive him, but to express their own satisfaction in his increased alacrity and vigour. The colour returned faintly to Margaret's cheeks, and one and all declared that she was more beautiful than ever; for there was something in her faded face, when it smiled, that was felt to be suitable to her whole character and lot, and clothed it, even to the unthinking, with a peculiar and appropriate loveliness.

Thus month after month, year after year, went on; and it was almost forgotten in the parish that young Mr and Mrs Oswald had ever been unhappy. There is something in affliction, especially if combined with sin or error, that the mind wishes not to remember, or to hear recalled. And here the presence of happiness and of goodness obliterated all such recollections, and allowed no thoughts to enter within the avenue of Nether-Place but those of kindness and respect. Ludovic had outlived all his frailties—they were like the withered leaves of a past season; and now the branches were again green, and every good affection grew beneath their shelter. The past was an almost forgotten dream; the present was a vivid reality.

But within the house of Nether-Place there was a happiness of which those without could know little or nothing; for that which others forgot, Ludovic and Margaret well remembered, and the

growth of years could not fill up the furrows which suffering had ploughed into their lives. He could not, wished not, to forget that he had been a man of many sins; and he held the uncertain tenure of his life from God with a sacred fear. He did not deliver himself up to a wild enthusiasm; he did not fling himself helplessly upon Divine mercy, without humbly striving to feel and act as religion required; he did not trust in the promises held forth to sinners, without knowing that better thoughts had gained an ascendancy over those that had so long been too familiar; he did not vainly conceive that all alliance had been broken off between himself of other years and himself of the present season; he still knew that hauntings from the past were with him still, to tempt and try; and he humbly suspected even his penitence, lest it might be only remorse for guilt, or regret of pleasure. But, deeply convinced that his frailties clung to him still, and that the seeds of sin were smothered, not utterly crushed, in his nature, he made small pretences before man to superior piety; and so much the more humbly did he prostrate himself before God.

There was, therefore, no loud merriment or boisterous mirth, even on the most joyful occasions, at Nether-Place: one settled spirit prevailed there, which nothing but utter oblivion of the past could destroy; but the spirit was not incompatible with profound happiness. In process of years, a new bliss sprung up in their lives, for a son and a daughter were born; and God preserved them both unharmed in smiling infancy. She who had been so dutiful a daughter, so affectionate a sister, and so loving a wife, what a heaven was it to her to be a mother! Her own little Walter and Alice, one in her arms, and the other playing at her feet, repaid her over and over again, every single day, for all the miseries she had ever suffered. All other kinds of affection may become too excessive; but that of a mother for her innocent children, nature consecrates, even although it should overflow the whole entire soul. Margaret had often upbraided herself with not loving better little Ludovic, the son of Hannah Blantyre, who lived with his grandfather, and cheered the old man with the light of a fresh-dawning affection. But too many sad emotions had hitherto been gathered round his harmless head. Now she comprehended him too in the expansion of her maternal bosom; and never was she so satisfied of the perfect restoration of her husband's character, as when she saw him absorbed in his children's smiles, and fondling them upon his knees. Their innocence appealed to all his best renovated feelings; and he who had been once so much the slave of selfish passions, and their easy prey, now lived in the perfect peace of those affections which carry a man out of himself, and attach him by mysterious links, finely spun, but strong as adamant, to the beauty of innocence.

Sailors do not live always upon the seas; and now Laurence Lyndsay came to Nether-Place, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. He and Lucy Oswald had not forgotten each other, although no promise had been made, nor even love avowed. But they had been true to each other without any such declaration; and on the day

that Margaret's boy completed his fifth year, they were married. The sailor had a comfortable independence; and, although he did not think of quitting his profession, he thought naturally, and not unwisely, that the future might take care of itself, and that he and Lucy, in the small cottage of Mill-Nook, might be happy for a few months, without remembering the sound of the sea.

The happiness which Margaret now enjoyed with her husband was not, they both knew, to last for ever, nor even for many years. His health never had been, never could be, restored. He himself had many intimations, incommunicable to others, of approaching dissolution; and he took his departure from this world so quietly, and with so little pain, that Margaret, who was sitting by his bed, and not immediately fearing the event, knew not the minute when he breathed his last. She had been reading to him from the Bible which had been given to her by Michael Grahame; and, pausing to speak about a passage, she looked towards him, and saw that his spirit had gone, as she humbly trusted, to heaven. His father had been for some time prepared to expect his death; and the old man was perfectly resigned to lose his son. It was over his sins and his frailties that he had wept most bitterly in other years; but his son had become a new man; and as he died in the faith, his old father, without great anguish, stood by the grave and saw his Ludovic buried. Over a braver man the volleying musketry had never sounded a requiem: but the death he had often sought on the field of battle had come at last like a shadow over him on a peaceful bed, and Ludovic Oswald was interred, after all his wanderings, in the burial-ground of his native parish.

Happiness did not forsake Margaret, now that she was a widow. The time once was that she would have wept in inconsolable anguish over the grave of her Ludovic. But time and change had fitted him for heaven, while gradual and unpainful decay had loosened the bands of this mortal life. Therefore she lived on undisturbed, calm, even glad, with her beautiful children. She did not load herself with widow's weeds, but all her life wore simple and unostentatious mourning, which showed that with the hope of meeting her husband in heaven was united the memory of the years passed with him on earth. Her daughter Alice was now a sweet, gentle, thoughtful girl of twelve years; reminding Margaret, by her placid face, meek eyes, and composed manner, of her own sainted mother. Walter, two years older, was all that her heart could wish. Sedate, studious, and fond of home, he excited no fears in her bosom lest he should ever leave her far, or seek his fortune in foreign countries. The gentle boy sought the society of his grandfather, and thought no life like that of a clergyman. Mr Oswald scarcely showed greater symptoms of old age than he had done many years ago, and educated Walter entirely himself for college. "Little Ludovic," as he had always been called, had turned out a fine, spirited, adventurous lad, and, by the kind offices of Mr Wedderburne, was sent out a cadet to India, full of hope and joy. Miss Wedderburne and her sisters, who now bore other names, in their own happiness, gave every delightful

proof of an unfading friendship. All was peace at the Manse, the Mill-Nook, and Nether-Place; and Margaret, who had so piously fulfilled her duties to her parents, became in turn the object of tenderest affection to her children. Their virtue and piety was her reward from the God who had proved her in affliction, and who now shed the light of His holiest comfort on her head, which, though not old, was yet waxing grey, and seemed, in its serene and solemn beauty, not to be destined for a long life here, but an eternity of bliss hereafter.

> "When soon or late they reach that coast,
> O'er life's rough ocean driven,
> May they rejoice, no wanderer lost,
> A family in heaven!"

THE FORESTERS.

THE FORESTERS.

CHAPTER I.

Of the humble mansions that, not many years ago, were thickly interspersed through the romantic scenery of the Esk, between Roslin and Lasswade, there was not one more beautiful than that which bore the appropriate name of Dovenest. It was built on a gentle eminence, that merely lifted it in safety above the highest watermark of the river sweeping round the little sylvan peninsula; and the breath of smoke that rose from its hidden chimneys was, even on the calmest day, lost on the broad bosom of the overshadowing wood, before it could reach the naked cliff that rose like a pillar into the sky. Several glades, and even pasture-fields, lay concealed at no great distance up and down the stream; and a few steps could, in either direction, lead into prospects of confined but richest cultivation, where the houses of the more opulent looked out cheerfully, each over its own quiet pleasure-ground, nor seemed, in their unostentatious retirement, at all out of unison with the character of the solitary or clustering cottages of the poorer inhabitants. But for a fantastic projection of rock, with its crown of drooping birch-trees, Dovenest would have commanded a view of the caverned cliffs of Hawthornden, and indeed even of Roslin Chapel. Although the castle was not visible, the rooks were seen flying over its turrets; and on a calm day the noise of the linn was heard below the foundations of the old place of worship. The village Sabbath-bell sent its voice so distinctly down the glen, that it sometimes seemed to be ringing close to the very cottage; and on a warm, still summer's day, there was but one sound of bees from the broomy knoll of Dovenest, to the wallflowers on the crevices of that hallowed ruin. There was felt to be a little quiet world within itself; and the same stream, the same rocks, the same line of sky, bound together cottage, chapel, and castle, in one spirit of harmonious beauty.

Dovenest was not a summer retreat for lawyer, citizen, or poet,

although it had often been coveted both by matter-of-fact and imaginative men, and its architecture been made to undergo frequent alteration in the day-dreams of tasteful artists; but it had been for thirty years the dwelling of its obscure and industrious owner, Adam Forester, a gardener. Adam Forester had been proud of that humble professional name in the prime of life, when his good spade was his only fortune; and he desired no better, in after times, when, by skill, labour, and integrity, he had accumulated sufficient capital to purchase that pretty little property, and by degrees, spring after spring, had made his nursery-garden the pride of all the glen, and, to idlers from the city, one of its rarest and most delightful attractions. The southern bank, which he had cleared from the embosoming wood, seemed to enjoy perpetual sunshine; and so happily sheltered was it by natural mounds and battlements, that often, while there was a storm among the oaks above, not a blossom was shaken from his fruit-trees; and the blackbird continued to sing undisturbed from the top of the steady larch that rose single from a grass plat in the middle of the garden. That larch was famous during early spring, in the perfect beauty of its tapering verdure, and glowing with a million cones of purple that lay profusely scattered over the long graceful branches that swept the mossy floor, up to the slender last year's shoot that scarcely supported the blithesome songster. Nothing could surpass the order and regularity prevalent over the parterres of flowers, the beds of seedlings, and the wider banks of infant forest-trees, already distinguishable in shape and hue of leaf, stalk, and tendril, but all equally unlike the gigantic forms they were destined one day to become in park or mountain. The spirit of young vegetable life wantoned everywhere around, below the shadow of the ancient woods; and old Adam Forester, the gardener, unconsciously loved the flowers and plants, among a constant succession of which he had spent upwards of forty not unhappy years. He had not reached his time of life without some heavy griefs; but when he went out to muse at eventide, he felt, like the patriarch of old, that God had to him been a God of mercy, and thought with profound peace of mind on the hour, now assuredly near at hand, when he should be laid in the same grave with the mother of his children—her whom he had buried twenty years ago, but whose image had been with him, to support and console, duly and without fail, at morning and evening prayers.

Adam Forester had enjoyed more of pure and real happiness than often falls to the lot of man in his condition of life, although, perhaps, that be sometimes the very happiest condition in the world. His mind, originally one of strength and sensibility, had received that best of all education—the education which untempted and unperverted nature bestows upon itself, during employment that is laborious but not slavish, and during leisure that is free for much thoughtfulness at least, if not for systematic study, in the interval benignly provided between the two twilights for the refreshment and restoration of every human soul. From youth to manhood, and from manhood to age, he had always been bettering his worldly cir-

cumstances: he had never made a single retrograde step in his lowly welldoing; and while many whom he acknowledged to be better than himself had suffered sore chances and changes, going down in trouble to untimely graves, and others had, in some few instances, become absolute paupers from vice or misfortune, he had thankfully enjoyed continual increase of prosperity, and along with it an enlargement too of heart that enabled him to feel the blessing of Providence. Although he lived in a thatched house, with such temperate appetites as its frugal hearth could easily supply—wore on work days the mean but decent apparel of a labourer—opened his Bible with a hand that labour had hardened—sat on the Sabbath in a pew among poor people—interchanged greetings on a footing of perfect equality with every honest individual of that class to whom, by his birth, he belonged—and required for the daily sustenance of his unambitious heart only the simple converse of working men—yet Adam Forester was not altogether a stranger to the society of persons occupying the more elevated stations of this life, nor in that society did he miss the respect due to his estimable character. In the way of his profession, he had become known to many men of wealth and rank; and the plain dignity of his manners, especially as age began to add to the lineaments of his countenance, that power of reverence which is superior to that of every mere artificial distinction, was acknowledged by all who had sense to discern and appreciate the natural and unalienable authority of intelligence and virtue.

Dovenest, therefore, although thus beautiful in its own seemingly romantic world, had never been the scen of any other joys and sorrows than such as belong necessarily and essentially to human nature in every condition. The worthy owner had suffered many domestic afflictions, but all in the common course of nature; and with a wife who tenderly and reverently loved him, and had discharged every duty towards him and their children in joyfulness and gratitude, he had lived many long peaceful years. During those years an infant—a child—one blooming girl—a boy of much promise—and, saddest loss of all, a son grown up to manhood—had been taken away, suddenly, or after lingering decay. Five funerals had there indeed been, before that blackest of them all, when the mother was carried to her rest. But these deprivations had been scattered over the length of full thirty years. Mercifully timed, it might be said, had been the visits of the angel of death. And although there not unfrequently had been seasons when smiles, or at least anything approaching to laughter, would have grated against the heartstrings of the whole saddened family, and when it almost seemed as if their happiness were never more to deserve that name, yet natural distress gradually yielded to natural comfort, and the survivors carried over upon one another, and into one another's hearts, the affection that had belonged to them that were no more seen, except in the startling visions of sudden waking recollection, or in the dreams of sleep.

Even the affliction that made Adam Forester a widower, brought

with it healing upon its wings. For, when his Judith died, she was not cut off suddenly in the prime of life, nor did she pine away in its fall; but after the grey hairs had been visibly mingled with the once bright brown, an illness, neither frightfully short nor tryingly prolonged, extinguished the lamp of life that burned clearly to the close; and with all the most anxious solicitudes of a mother's heart at rest, she was resigned to shut her eyes upon her husband and her two dutiful sons. Her sober matronly steps and quiet smiles were no more seen, and in a few years generally forgotten. But in not a few neighbouring families her image remained, as if her picture had hung upon the wall; and the poor continued to bless her who had not only relieved their hunger, but had given charity to their friendless souls. The lines of labour and advancing age were painfully deepened on the widower's face during the year she left him, and the neighbours all prognosticated that he would never recover the blow. But theirs was a common mistake; the old man was not forsaken in his bereavement; in a few weeks he took his place in his pew in the kirk; the lark called him to his garden—not, perhaps, from such sleep as he had once enjoyed; and although they who knew him intimately saw a change in all his demeanour, and heard a difference in the usual tones of his speech, yet, to indifferent observers, he was the same active, industrious old man as before. Nor did Dovenest undergo any perceptible diminution of its cheerful neatness, except that there seemed about it a less gorgeous flush of flowers than formerly, and that the lustre of the latticed windows was not so spotless, and somewhat more thickly overgrown, now that one pruning hand was cold. But Adam Forester, in his more awful hours, was not without a source of comfort, that every year flowed deeper and deeper in the midnight silence; while, in his ordinary work-day life in the open air, he had the best of earthly solaces in a fair reputation, health yet unimpaired, a sound understanding, and a clear conscience; a sufficient competence against the evil of eld, two dutiful sons, and, above all, the love of labour, strong as that of life itself, that subdues within the heart a thousand vain anxieties, and changes the stern law of necessity, against which many fruitlessly rebel, into the voluntary choice of a calm and well-ordered life.

On the death of his wife, Adam Forester had been left with two sons, Michael and Abel. They had both received a regular education, and possessed more than ordinary abilities. Michael had, at one time, thought of becoming a clergyman, and had attended the university; but, on his mother's death, he felt it to be impossible to leave his father alone, and being fonder every month of that way of life, and deeply attached to the place of his birth, he resolved to follow his father's employment, and had now done so for many years. He was a man of staid deportment and quiet manners, but of deep and strong feelings—it may, indeed, be said passions—and of extraordinary strength of intellect. But he had no worldly ambition, and was satisfied to live the same homely and obscure life with his father. He was enough of a scholar to be able to read the Old and New Testaments in their original tongues; and his favourite studies, next

to theology, circumscribed as they necessarily became, were natural history and astronomy. Each year brought, independently of reading, its own growth of inward knowledge; and Michael Forester of Dovenest had long been esteemed the first man in all the neighbourhood for general talents, and sound practical information in the business of life. His whole appearance betokened no ordinary character; and although he did not purposely keep aloof from the young men of the place, his infinite and unapproachable superiority was felt by them all, and he was looked upon as the equal of the parish minister, and other persons of education and authority. Proud was the old man of such a son, but it was a pride that now and then only made its way into a heart fortified with a far higher principle—that of religious gratitude; and as they worked in their garden together, the grey-headed father would sometimes rest his withered hand on his spade, and, leaning over it as if to pause from his work, bless his son in a fervent prayer, nor care if his dim eyes poured down upon the ground a shower of passionate tears. Working together, day after day, from morning to night, and sitting together every evening, there was often long silence between them, but never any dearth of inward thoughts; and each heart was as fertile of affectionate feelings as the soil of the garden beneath the common labour of their hands. The very helplessness of old age was felt to be a happy state in the presence of such a protector; and when the old man would lay himself down, during the heat of the day, beneath the shadow of the sycamores, for a single hour of rest, reluctantly availing himself of the privilege of threescore and ten years, his closing eyes could not help seeing, in his dutiful son, as it were the figure of an angel watching over his sleep.

Abel, the younger brother, although now far less deserving than Michael, was, notwithstanding, almost as dear to his father; for strong instinctive affection will not yield to the law of desert, and the frailties, the follies, and even sins of children, will often mournfully endear them to their parents. Abel too, in face, in eyes, the colour of hair, and the tone of voice, was the very image of his mother; and grievous as had been his misconduct, that overpowering resemblance had never pleaded for him in vain. There was also much that was redeeming in his amiable but uncertain character; and how could a father long retain wrath, or even strong displeasure, towards one so ready to repent, so warm in his affections, and, when away from evil associates, so perfectly winning in all his ways, and so reconciled even to an active and industrious life? Lively, versatile, and ingenious—he was, indeed, when at home, the light and the music of the house and garden; and the old man thought, and still thought, and fondly deluded himself into conviction, often broken and as often repaired, that Abel was about to reform, and become a credit to him, like Michael, in his declining days. Although Abel had not yet absolutely disgraced himself by any dishonest or dishonourable action, a mist hung over his reputation both in town and country; his few known associates were persons of profligate habits; rumours were afloat in the neighbourhood of an indefinite but distressing kind; and it was the belief of all, that ere long he would

bring himself to disgrace and ruin. His father tried to shut both his eyes and his ears, but still he saw and heard enough to fill his mind with dismal apprehensions; and, now that all the past was peace—now that he could look, not only without one single pang on the gravestone above his Judith, and the other five dead ones, all of them long ago so tenderly beloved, but even with the profound satisfaction of expecting rest—he felt it cruel to be disturbed, almost at death's door, by a son to whom he had been, perhaps, but too indulgent, and whose errors seemed, month after month, to be darkening into wickedness. O that Abel were reformed! thought often the old man—and that prayer was sometimes worded in his sleep—then might I yield up my spirit to its Maker! Abel knew well his father's grief, and often wept bitterly, like a child, before his tremulous rebuke—too like a child, for his tears were soon dried; gay smiles, too delightful to a forgiving father, took their place, and after the deep but transient calm of reconcilement which Abel had a heart tender enough to feel, but not firm enough to remember, away he flew like a bird, and disappeared for months in the unknown dissipation and vice of the city. "My boy loves me as kindly as ever, but he reverences me no more, and my power over him is but as of a shadow. O Michael! when I am dead, try to save poor Abel; for if evil befall him, methinks my bones will not rest in the grave!"

Such words as these were not lost upon Michael; for, independently of his filial reverence, he loved his brother Abel with exceeding affection. Indeed, the very difference in their characters, pursuits, and habits, endeared them to each other; and while the elder brother could not help being won by that mirth and merriment, that frolic and whim, so foreign to his own nature, but so congenial with the whole frame of Abel's, that unthinking boy could not but venerate in Michael that irreproachable practice and those uncompromising principles in which he found himself to be so deplorably deficient in the hour of trial. The disparity in their age also (for Michael was the elder by upwards of ten years) gave an endearing character to their mutual affection. It had always preserved between them an unbroken integrity of feeling, without the deadening or alienating interruptions of jealous or angry moods. Abel no more thought of ever quarrelling with Michael than with his father himself; and if ever Michael had occasion to chide or reprove him, the remonstrance was indeed fatherly in spirit and in word, tempered at the same time by the sense of the feebler authority of brotherhood, and breathed forth as a confidential communication between friend and friend.

"You must not think that I love Abel better than you, Michael, although sometimes it would even seem as if the dear unhappy boy did indeed drive you out of my heart. No—no—no—you, Michael, are my best-beloved son—boy, lad, and man the same—true at all times to me, your aged father, and to your God. If ever I have been silent, cold, harsh, or sullen towards you, my son, I ask your forgiveness, for, in truth, age chills even something of the warmth at a father's heart."

The father and son were sitting together on a bench in a sort of

small natural arbour that faced the light of the setting sun; and as Michael looked on the old man's face, he felt that he had never before noticed the wrinkles so deep, nor seen over all his countenance so strong a shadow of the world to come. He knelt down and asked a blessing. Tenderness and awe were like a religion in his spirit; and as the withered hands were laid upon his head, he felt as if a human parent were interceding for him with a divine, and that such prayers would not be unheard in heaven. At that moment light footsteps were heard, and Abel stood before the opening of the arbour.

There was a wild and unsettled expression in his eyes, a feverish flush over his cheeks, and his whole demeanour was disturbed. Self-dissatisfaction and shame, mixed with an angry recklessness, sadly obscured that face on which, a few years ago, every one that knew it looked with pleasure and affection. Yet the unhappy youth could not now divest himself of that respect, that veneration with which he had from his very heart always treated his father. The scowl which he had summoned to his brow gave way before the solemn look of the old man's dim eyes, and, struck at once into remorse for the mere show of disrespect to his father, Abel hung down his head and wept. When he found voice, he said—"Father, I am going to leave Dovenest for good and all, and to-morrow I set off for England with Will Mansell. You must not ask me any questions—I could not think of going without coming to ask your forgiveness and your blessing." The old man, who had long feared the worst of his son, now felt that the worst had almost befallen him; for Mansell was a man of a ruined reputation, and known to be familiar with criminals. "Yes—yes—Abel, here is my blessing—and my forgiveness;" and the old man rose up and kissed his undutiful son, with many tears. Meanwhile, Michael retired a short distance from the arbour, and when he returned to take farewell of his brother, Abel was gone. "O Michael, when I am dead—and this parting has taken some months from the year I might have had to live—never lose your pity for Abel, for much, I fear, will he stand in need of pity, hurrying on to disgrace or destruction."—"My brother shall never want," said Michael, "while these hands have strength to work—while there is water in the channel of the Esk, and corn grows upon its banks. But I will go after him, and perhaps he will return to his father's house."—"No, Michael; he will never return—never in my time, at least; and if he does return, it will be as a wretched beggar—ay, worse than a beggar, a criminal—flying perhaps from justice, and his life forfeit to the law."

That severe passion of grief did not, however, endure long in a heart that, in all its sufferings, had found what strength there is in submission. The old man hearkened to comfort from his elder son, and tried to convince himself that his fears might prove to have been altogether ungrounded. And a letter from Abel, about a month after, written in a kind and cheerful spirit, restored him apparently to his usual composure, so that it might be said that Dovenest was again happy.

CHAPTER II.

Among the lowly households closely connected in ancient friendship with the family at Dovenest, there was none so dear on any account as that of Sprinkeld—a cottage that stood by itself in a sheltered holm, a few fields from Lasswade. It had been built by a native of the village, a prosperous tradesman, who died in the prime of life, leaving a widow and one daughter. His widow did not long survive him; and the child was left to the care of a female relation who had resided in the family, and who loved the orphan, Agnes Hay, as tenderly as if she had been her mother. This excellent person had lost her husband many years before, and had no children. Her whole income consisted of the very moderate jointure which she enjoyed as the widow of a clergyman, from the best of all charitable institutions; but this, added to the little fortune of her ward, was a complete independence, and enabled them to lead the same life to which they had been accustomed, without difficulty or privation. Agnes Hay had, therefore, never felt what it is to be an orphan. She had lost both her parents before she was eight years old; and at that innocent and joyful age, less than one single summer suffices to wipe away the bitterest tears, although their source is still left open in the unpainful affection of the heart. Perhaps those early afflictions gave a somewhat deeper tone of pensiveness to a character naturally thoughtful and sedate; and, no doubt, the remembrances of her dead parents survived more distinctly and tenderly in that retired and almost solitary life. Being an only child, and having had few playmates, her thoughts and feelings naturally reverted to the past, so that the bygone happiness of her childhood was never entirely forgotten, but continued to blend itself with all those unsought enjoyments which nature graciously provides for the expanding affections. Few incidents or events had occurred to diversify her calm and contented life, nor had any strong emotions ever disturbed the tranquillity of her innocence. Each succeeding Sabbath found her humbly trusting in that contrite spirit which even the most innocent must feel when joining in the services of religion; and weeks, months, and years had glided by, leaving her now, in the prime of youth, a favourite with all the families in the neighbourhood, even with those to whom she was hardly more known than by appearance or name; while at those firesides where she was a familiar guest, she was beloved with a perfect love for all those delightful endowments that showed themselves more attractively in the unconscious simplicity of her mild and gentle manners, and almost veiled her beauty itself under that charm of character which, belonging peculiarly to the gifted individual, is felt to be at once permanent and irresistible.

Neither Michael Forester nor Agnes Hay knew that they were in love with each other. Indeed, for two or three years past, it had almost seemed as if there had been some slight shadow thrown over the friendship of the two families. Accidental causes, such as will

often arise in the least varied lot, had made the footpath less frequently trodden that led from Dovenest to Sprinkeld. But where there is sincere and well-founded mutual affection in good hearts, it remains unimpaired among all hindrances, interruptions, or absence. Pleasant remembrances of words and looks supply the place of actual interchanges of kindness; and perhaps the softened images of innocent delight, returning of their own accord upon our hearts, do more than anything else in this world to attach us to those with whom that delight had been enjoyed. Agnes Hay was frequently hearing the character of Michael Forester spoken of by those whom she most respected in terms of the highest praise—his talents, his industry, his uprightness, and, what was even more touching to her heart than them all, his filial piety, and his fond attachment to his infatuated brother. Sometimes she thought what happiness it would have been had she been his daughter, or his sister, or any near blood relation, so that she might have had the privileges of an inmate of his household. She had, indeed, scarcely one single relation living but Aunt Isobel, as she had called from her infancy the good old lady who was her protectress. Such thoughts passed through her heart oftener than she was aware, but without any disturbance of feeling; for although she interchanged affectionate greetings with Michael Forester every Sabbath at church, and not unfrequently saw him on ordinary weekday occasions, her heart was entirely free from passion. Never had she fallen into one single vain dream of him and his dwelling; so that had he married another, it did not seem to Agnes that such an event would have affected, or at least diminished, the happiness of her contented life. And yet, when Aunt Isobel, in speaking of his excellence, had once said, what a happy woman would be the wife of Michael Forester, Agnes had unconsciously turned away her face; and as she did so, her eyes fell upon the geraniums in all their rich and variegated glow which she had received from him, and had tended with assiduous care, as she herself thought, entirely for the sake of their own beauty.

With Michael Forester the case was somewhat different. He was fifteen years older than Agnes; and although the growing charms of her womanhood had gradually inspired him with far other feelings than those with which he had been accustomed to regard the pretty little child that he had often led by the hand through his gardens, and sent away, happy as a fairy, with a bunch of flowers, yet a sense of the disparity of years, which to him seemed far greater than it was in reality, kept down, as if it were even in his conscience, any fonder affection for Agnes as she had been stealing into the beauty of her prime. It seemed impossible that she could love him; and that belief in the mind of such a man overcame all vain hopes, and reconciled him, without much pain, to the thought of some day seeing Agnes Hay the wife of another. He therefore strove with himself, and not altogether unsuccessfully, not indeed to abstain from her society, for that was impossible, but to regard her at all times as one to whom he could never be more than a friend, or a brother or a father. Sometimes, in the quiet of a beautiful summer evening

when, in his silent leisure, his mind unconsciously framed pictures of the future, he felt that to Agnes Hay he could be all these, and more, far more than them all; that to see her beautiful countenance at that lattice window—her delightful figure walking along that green—her white arms employed in training the roses around the trellis-work of that humble porch—to hear her name him in the familiar words of love, and tune her soft voice especially for his ear—thoughts like these did sometimes indeed overpower him—for he had led a pure and unstained life—vice had withered not one fibre of his heart—he had wasted none of his best emotions on unworthy objects—so that his visions of domestic happiness were bright and strong, and he looked on them with the same solemn, devout, and sacred spirit with which, on the Sabbath-day, he entered the place set apart for worship. But still the belief recurred that Agnes could not love him—that she would one day be another man's wife; and in depriving himself of the dangerous enjoyment of his own loving, almost impassioned thoughts, he felt that such self-denial brought its own recompense, and heightened that happiness which Providence had allowed him to enjoy without either fear or blame, and which he humbly acknowledged was sufficient for contentment and gratitude.

One beautiful Sabbath evening, Michael Forester was walking by himself along the banks of the Esk, and met Agnes Hay going to Roslin to bring home her aunt, who had that day attended divine service in that church. The meeting at such a time, and in such a state of their affections, was felt by them both to be more than usually happy. Agnes took Michael's arm with cheerful willingness, and they spoke of everything most interesting to the welfare of their respective homes. The sweet serenity of the afternoon was in perfect unison with that of their own hearts; and Agnes, the orphan Agnes, with such a friend by her side, felt as calmly confident of the duration of her peace, as if she had had a hundred kind and rich relations alive, and the future provided and fenced in against the intrusion of any earthly calamities. All the woods were ringing with vernal delight and joy; and her countenance, whose general character was meek and pensive, was now tinged with the very light of gladness; her steps, usually so graceful in their composure, were now no less so in the buoyancy of exhilaration; and without doing the slightest violence to the native and prevalent modesty of her demeanour, the innocent creature's perfect happiness enlivened every attitude and every motion, while not altogether unconscious, perhaps, of the power of her beauty, she stepped over stone and stalk, on their devious hill-side track, through the overhanging trees whose branches sometimes almost impeded their progress, and touched their heads with the first odorous buds of an early spring.

Dovenest and its gardens lay before them at a sudden bend of the river. The cushat-dove was sounding his deep song in the pines behind the low thatched roof, and in front, the bright golden oak, whose foliage preceded by at least a fortnight that of all the other trees, shone in the setting sun. "Will you cross the stepping-stones, my dear Agnes, and see how this spring promises in our gardens?

You have not been within our gate once during this finest and most forward of all Aprils, and to-morrow is May-day." Agnes was glad to comply; and they descended into the channel of the river, where, at the head of a stream that formed a small waterfall, there was a natural ledge of rock, over which, when the water was low, it was easy to cross the Esk. The showery April had, however, slightly flooded the stream, and while Agnes was speaking of going round by the wooden bridge, Michael Forester took her gently in his arms, and, in a few moments, let her down from his breast, in all her blushing beauty, on the turf of his own paternal acres. The heart within that manly breast, by habit and duty in general so calm, beat as loudly as if it were the heart of fear itself in an unexpected peril. Her pure breath had been close to his cheek—closer than it had ever before been since she was a child—and he had felt on his side the motion of that virgin bosom, where purity, innocence, and loveliness were folded up together in most beautiful repose. "She is an orphan," thought Michael—"O that this very blessed day I could win her heart!" and hope came to him from the unoffended expression of her downcast eyes, as they walked arm-in-arm towards his house. Few words were uttered by him—and none by Agnes—till they entered the little white gate, with its arch of woodbine and sweetbriar; and as it closed behind them, Michael Forester felt suddenly that what he loved most on this earth was now within the boundaries of his own dwelling. Dearer was she to him than all his other best and happiest possessions—than all other remembrances—all other hopes—even than his father's grey hairs. Yet at the very time that he thus knew, in the tumult of his heart, that the fair and meek orphan was, and must for ever be to him life itself, and that without her life would be as death, yet his other human affections were not lost or swallowed up in that stronger love, but rather all comprehended within its influence, so that he loved both father and brother, and his other friends, better for the sake of his own Agnes Hay.

With a faltering voice, which he in vain tried to compose, Michael Forester said, with great tenderness—"The time was, Agnes, when you came almost every day to Dovenest; then it was only week after week; now I may say it is only month after month; and in future, perhaps, it may be only year after year. Yet it might be better for me if it were so; for, Agnes, you will be the wife of another soon perhaps; and whenever that happens, may the blessing of God fall upon you; but from that day shall I be the most miserable of men. I love you, Agnes; but I know that you cannot love me—it is impossible!" And as the image of the fair child passed before him, dancing along the very walk where they now stood, with garlands of flowers wreathed round her small waist and arms, he felt with a pang that Agnes could not now look on him as a lover, whom she must have so long regarded with such other feelings; and he remained silent in his despair.

The whole heart of Agnes Hay seemed to herself to have undergone a deep change since she had met Michael only an hour ago;

but, in truth, she had for years loved him in the undisturbed innocence of her gentle nature. She had, oftener than she knew, thought of him, as a certain despondency would sometimes come over her when musing on her orphan state; and therefore this avowal of his love, although wholly unexpected, did not find her altogether unprepared. The words, heard at first with a delightful doubt of their meaning, reached, before Michael had ceased speaking, the very core of her heart; and never having had any attachment to any other person beyond that of mere ordinary kindness, she felt that she could give him all that her life had ever contained, without reserve of one single transitory feeling. "Impossible to love Michael Forester!—no—no—say not so—I have loved you ever; and I will love you as long as I know to love all that is good, worthy, and most estimable in a Christian husband." That one last word was sufficient for Michael Forester's perfect happiness; and he folded this beautiful orphan in as warm and reverential an embrace as ever brought woman to man's beating bosom.

They walked for a while, silent and composed, through the dewy arbours; and stood, hand in hand beside the dial, shadowless at the sweet hour of eight, in the last dewy evening of April. All around was orderly, peaceful, prosperous, and beautiful. Then, as if by the same impulse, they bent their way towards the house; and Michael fervently blessed his Agnes as she stepped across the threshold. They sat down together in the neat little parlour, whose window looked up the Esk, upon a home-scene hemmed in by a fantastic sweep of wooded rocks. The large family Bible was lying open on the table; and Michael, taking the hand of his Agnes, laid it upon the sacred volume, and in that betrothment, with a reverential prayer of thanksgiving, they vowed to love one another until death. Agnes shed a few tears over the blessed page; but they were such tears as nature consecrates to her best affections, and assuredly were not of evil omen. Michael Forester kissed others away from her sweet eyes, as her head rested upon his breast; and in that tender and sacred embrace, in which he folded his betrothed, and in which a pious spirit expressed its gratitude to Heaven for an unhoped and boundless happiness, Agnes felt, beyond all possibility of being deceived, that she had committed her lot in this life to a man who knew the value of innocence, and in wedlock would cherish and respect it. But voices were heard near the porch; and although Agnes knew well whose they were, and had nothing to fear from such intruders, yet a new tremor crept over her at their approach, and her heart, that had beat tranquilly in the arms of her lover, palpitated violently as she arose to meet her own Aunt Isobel and old Adam Forester.

A few words from Michael explained the reason of all those unusual tears, and that speechless confusion. Aunt Isobel could not but give herself some little credit for having always internally predicted that this would be a marriage some day; but now that her few doubts and misgivings were removed, and she found that she was in good truth a prophetess, she could not help weeping in her joy,

as she thought that now, die when she might, her beloved orphan would not be left desolate. The old man had always loved Agnes as his own child, and had sometimes allowed himself to wish that Abel had been deserving of such a wife. Now that his eyes were opened to what he had never before suspected, and saw Michael in possession of such a treasure, he blessed her with a fervent voice, and pronounced her name as if he dwelt upon the sound; for the name of the daughter he had lost was Agnes, and he had read it but a few hours ago on her gravestone. The thought of poor Abel and his careless follies passed across the old man's mind, and he felt that if that dear boy would but repent and reform, it would be a blessed lot to be gathered with the dead, for that then the whole happiness possible to human life would have been his, and it would therefore be time to depart. But the closing shades of evening warned the party to break up—the stars were already faintly visible—and Agnes, who did not forget others in her own happiness, feared that Aunt Isobel might suffer from the cold dews. So in a few minutes they left Dovenest; but not before the evening psalm had been sung, in which the voice of Agnes, silvery sweet, but somewhat tremulous, touched Michael's heart, in his own house, with a profounder emotion than his nature had ever experienced before; while the old man, unable to withstand the beauty of its holiness, could not continue his part in the sacred melody, but bowed down his head, and with a broken voice breathed a few words of thanksgiving.

CHAPTER III.

Few ostentatious ceremonies marked these humble nuptials; yet decent preparations had been made for their change of life, and the marriage-day of Michael Forester and Agnes Hay was almost a kind of holiday in Lasswade and its neighbourhood. Some little idle gossip there had, no doubt, been about the happy couple, for at least a month before the union; for Agnes was not only beautiful, but an heiress; and it is surprising what interest some good people take in the dearest concerns of those with whom they are not perhaps at all acquainted, but for whom they hold themselves entitled even to judge and decide, from the single circumstance of having seen them at church or market. Some wise critics in marriage matters could not help thinking that Michael Forester, although a most excellent man, was somewhat too old and grave for so very young and lovely a bride, and were anxious to justify that opinion by adding some ten years to his useful life. Some conscientious persons, again, were much afraid that Agnes Hay, who had been bred up daintily under the care of her aunt, who, it was well known, had always taken upon herself the whole trouble of housekeeping, would make but an indifferent wife to a man who had followed a laborious

profession, and would probably expect more activity and frugality than it was likely he would find in a young woman spoiled by ease and indulgence. Others wondered, and of their wondering could find no end, what would become of poor Mrs Irvine? Young Mrs Forester would surely never be so heartless as to leave her by herself at her advanced time of life; and yet, should she take the good old lady with her to Dovenest, who could say to a certainty that she would prove agreeable to the husband, or to his father, who was well known to be rather a particular sort of man, of perfect integrity, but of a very imperfect temper?

These serious topics had been very seriously discussed at the tea-tables of Lasswade, Roslin, and their neighbourhood, and had given rise to many clashing and conflicting opinions. All anxiety, however, in the public mind about Aunt Isobel was removed; for even on the very marriage-day she went with her dearly beloved Agnes from Sprinkeld to Dovenest. Her own parlour there had been prepared for her weeks before; and a pretty parlour it was—the very same in which she had first known that Michael and Agnes had pledged their troth; with a low roof, and one window down to the floor—a window that, but for weekly pruning, would soon have been blinded by the clustering roses; and from which she could see a little waterfall, woods, and rocks, on either side a few pasture fields, here and there the roof of a half-hid house, or the blue smoke from chimneys concealed entirely in the groves of Dryden.

The summer months passed over Dovenest in perfect happiness; and that silent and somewhat melancholy spirit that for a few years had lain on the house and grounds, was now almost wholly dispelled. Although the old man could never for one day forget his Abel, yet Agnes filled up the void in his heart. In all things she was indeed a daughter. There was no interference, however slight, with his habits, formed insensibly during the lapse of so many years—no hindrance from household arrangements ever met him in any of his own peculiar ways, from morning to night—no formal officiousness ever caused him trouble by its ill-timed attempts to prevent or remove it—no unimportant word—no unsympathising look ever made him feel that there was a separation between the souls of the old and young. But Agnes, from the first week of her abode at Dovenest, had felt and understood, with the delicate and fine discrimination of a loving nature, the prevalent spirit of the household. In the fearless confidence of an affection which was to endure for life, she gently took upon herself the management of all those little concerns necessary for her father's comfort, and walked about the place with as familiar and unrestrained a happiness as if she had herself been born in the house, and had attended on her father from the earliest years of moral reason. Sprinkeld itself, pleasant place as it was, and the scene of her whole previous happy life, was not forgotten, but removed, as it were, far back into the distance of years. For in her husband's house was her whole heart centred—beyond the white garden-gate her thoughts never strayed—and all the beautiful or affecting images, which other happy days and

scenes had supplied, were now all collected together within the bounds of Dovenest. A thousand delightful visits which she had made there long ago, and had forgotten, now rose distinctly to her remembrance; she recollected the voice, the figure, the occupation, the kindness to her, then a child, of him who was now her husband; and in all those renewals of the past, made involuntarily, and by the mere force of affection, there was nothing different from what she now experienced; but, although at that time imperfectly understood, the same goodness, integrity, and peace had been witnessed, within whose bosom she now lived in love and gratitude.

Michael Forester led, outwardly, just his usual life; but the whole world had to him undergone a sudden and blessed transformation. Hitherto he had been happy in the cultivation and enlargement of his intellect—in the discharge of his duties—and in the indulgence of filial and paternal affection. These pleasures were with him still; but now a being, simpler, purer, more innocent far—more benignant towards all her fellow-creatures, and more entirely pious to her Creator, than he felt it possible that he himself or any other man could be—laid herself and her whole life in trust within his bosom. Such blessedness, only a few months before, he had not even ventured to imagine, much less to hope. Agnes Hay he indeed had always loved, but only as one most fair and good, who was to be nothing more to him, and everything to some happier man. Now, their lives were blended together, and he felt his whole character elevated and purified by the union. Not a day now passed without absolute happiness, without calm and deep enjoyment. Every day was now divided into hours of different delight; so that life itself, which formerly escaped away unnoticed—year following year in confusion within the memory—seemed now to be prolonged by the continual and uninterrupted succession of employments for the hand and the heart, each giving way to the other, but, when over, still all remembered.

Adam Forester now worked but seldom, and when he did, only for his amusement. This his son insisted upon; for there was no need to conceal from his father that his strength was much decayed, and that his work days were over. We know not what causes within the soul may affect, for good or evil, the body of old age. It seemed as if all Abel's misconduct, and even his desertion of home, had not touched the old man's frame so strongly as the perfect happiness with which he now saw himself surrounded. That happiness had given a shock—a gentle one, no doubt, but still not unperceived—to that frame which had borne, undepressed and unfaltering, the weight of threescore and ten laborious years, with all their inevitable anxieties and sorrows. His hand, long so steady, had now more than a slight tremble when lifted up in prayer; even with his glasses he could read the Word of God no more: but the voice of Agnes, soft and low as it was, was still not indistinctly heard by his now dulled ear, when louder tones were all undistinguishable; and on her arm alone would he lean in his Sabbath walk along the Esk, and confess to her, his dutiful daughter, that an unpainful sense of weakness told him to

hold himself ready for perhaps a sudden summons. But such solemn thoughts were reserved for solemn times; and so cheerful were his ordinary converse and demeanour, that it was remarked by all his neighbours, that although there might be a change for the worse in his bodily frame, yet that the youth of Adam Forester's mind seemed indeed to have been renewed.

But the happiness of this household would have been incomplete without Aunt Isobel. She was indeed the most lively and cheerful of all possible old ladies, blest with untamable good spirits, and that happy constitutional temperament that cannot abide the pressure of unnecessary or undue sorrows. Having been all her life long, from mere childhood, thrown upon her own resources, and accustomed to a busy, bustling, and careful life, all her energetic qualities had been cultivated to the utmost, and she looked upon idleness as at once the greatest of sins and of punishments. She was always doing something, and would have found some regular employment even in the solitary cell of a prison. Yet, although constantly on the alert, she was never teasing nor troublesome in her activity; although perpetually moving about, she was never in anybody's way; and in the midst of her multifarious concerns she always wore a smiling face, as if perfectly mistress of her business, and sure of the result—which result was never her own ease, of which she at no time thought, but the ease, comfort, or happiness of others. She was not much of a literary woman, although her powers of wit, humour, and raillery, would have set many a bluestocking aghast; but, nevertheless, she had her album. A formidable quarto it was, and therein had she copied, in a neat old-fashioned hand, full of dexterous contractions, and in an orthography original and ingenious, almost every receipt, however recondite, known to the then culinary world. Indeed, that book of magic told how best to do everything that could be done in any house, from hall to hut. And although Aunt Isobel had never had an opportunity of displaying her knowledge and powers on a very splendid scale, yet had it been acknowledged by the whole world that Sprinkeld was a perfect model of the most beautiful order and neatness that ever was seen, and that everything within doors, just as without, seemed to go on of itself by some natural process, change succeeding change, without any apparent effort, like the very season.

With a heart full of tenderness, and alive to every kind human feeling, Mrs Irvine—for that was Aunt Isobel's name—made no pretence to sensibility. On the contrary, she was much averse to the shedding of tears, which she thought should be reserved for solemn occasions—frequent enough, as she had herself experienced, in this uncertain world. Although the most charitable of Christians in thought, word, and deed, she disliked the whining even of real poverty and distress; and often gave alms with a severe countenance, which some finer spirits might probably think dimmed the merit and marred the beauty of the charitable deed. But Mrs Irvine thought neither of the merit nor the beauty of her limited charities—they were from a kind, humble, and pious heart; and she thought her

Maker would be best pleased when He beheld her relieving, under His providence, the wants of the worthy, and sometimes even giving unto the vicious and the wicked, since their wants are indeed the greatest and the most mournful that can befall the children of men. Hers was a deep, still, unostentatious religion, that but slightly coloured her outward demeanour upon week-days; but duly as the Sabbath came, her whole appearance, person, and deportment were calmed and elevated. Every worldly care, however laudable in itself at other times, was now thrown aside with her weekly garments; those quick busy steps became composed and even dignified; that sharp shrill voice was subdued into a pleasant lowness; her face, which had never at any time been more than comely, but always expressive of goodness and intelligence, was now almost beautiful in its tranquillity, with her grey hair decently braided over her open and yet unwrinkled forehead; and as, in her black silk gown, which were her widow's weeds thirty years ago, and had never been worn but on Sabbaths, she took her place in her pew in the kirk, and placed before her the Bible which her husband had given her on her wedding day, there was not perhaps in all the congregation one more like a lady than she, if such a distinction may be thought of in such a place, while assuredly there was not one more truly a Christian.

How then could the family at Dovenest be otherwise than happy? It seemed to Michael and Agnes as if the first summer of their marriage, even independently of their own joy, was most especially beautiful. Never, in the memory of Adam Forester himself, had there been so many soft, warm, and dewy nights, so many cloudless and sunbright days. In spring the frost had spared the blossoms—the summer insects had not touched the fruits—and the autumn had come mildly to gather her ripened riches.

CHAPTER IV.

The merry Christmas week was just over, with all its festivities, and the new year had begun to open auspiciously on the family at Dovenest, when, one forenoon, a stranger, of most respectable appearance, came into the garden, and inquired for Michael Forester. They retired into an inner room, and the visitor did not take his leave for upwards of an hour. Michael accompanied him to the gate, and on his return into the house, his disturbed and troubled countenance did not for a moment escape the notice of his wife. Indeed, she had never before seen her husband so agitated, and knew well enough that something most disastrous must have happened. Her fears were instantly for Abel; although she could not help dimly apprehending some evil personal to Michael himself, so haggard and even ghastly was the expression of his long, dark, and gloomy silence.

She followed him into his room, and, sitting down by his side, took hold of his hand, and looked up to his face, but without smiling, or uttering a word. Her husband looked on her with gentle, but sad and even weeping eyes, and, folding her to his bosom, said—"Abel has ruined himself and all of us for ever. Yes, Agnes, he has beggared us all; and, O Agnes! what is worse, far far worse than beggary, he has committed a fearful and a fatal crime—is a forger and a felon—may die the death of shame—and the white head of the old man may yet be brought to the dust in agony and dishonour. Yes, it will kill him. Abel has murdered his father—Abel whom he loved so tenderly—Abel whom he will yet weep over in forgiveness, when his tongue no more is able to pronounce a blessing. Poor, lost, unhappy boy! we will all of us forgive him. And, O Agnes! that the wide sea were now rolling between him and us, so that the dreadful arm of the law might not reach him, and his life be safe from the cruelty of justice, in a foreign land!"

The time had now come, soon and unexpectedly, when Agnes felt herself called upon to exert that power which her heart told her resided in its pious innocence. No repining pang shot through that instructed heart—no selfish grief, when thus told suddenly that poverty was to be her lot—no woeful disappointment of lawful hopes which it had been her duty to cherish—no vain wish—no idle thoughts flung back to the independent retirement of Sprinkeld—but with the whole passion of love that existed in her nature, she embraced her husband's neck, and, with every kindest and most encouraging word, addressed to his own ear, mingled prayers of holiest fervour for his peace of mind to the Giver of all mercies. "O Michael! what need we care for poverty?—nay, poor can we never be, although all our worldly substance may have melted like the snow. For Abel we must for ever weep, and also for our father; but, Michael, my Michael, yield not to your despair; he will escape—he will escape—fear it not; and when we hear and know that he is safe, happier shall we all be than ever; although that, indeed, is impossible, for, since I was your wife, too happy have I been for any one in this mortal world."

It was fortunate that Adam Forester had gone, this sunny forenoon, to Roslin, and thus escaped hearing this intelligence, which, no doubt, the stranger would have communicated to him had he been at home. In a wonderfully short time, Michael recovered first from the fever, and then from the stupor of that great grief. Agnes had had no arts of allurement or fascination when she was a maiden; but in her unreserved simplicity had she given him her affection. Nor since her marriage had she ever sought to sway his mind, either in trifling or serious concerns, but by the truth and purity of disinterested love, which had no other object in this life but to make him happy. Now, she had made use not of many words, nor yet of very many tears; but those that were said and shed had done their office, and her husband was perfectly composed in this most severe affliction. As he looked on her calm still beautiful face, almost smiling, and which, had it not been for the thoughts of Abel, would most

assuredly have smiled, with its usual untroubled sweetness, on the prospect of poverty or even want, he could not but feel the utter worthlessness of all other possessions; while the hopeful light of her eyes beaming fondly upon him, forced him to believe that his brother would escape, and that the worst evil he had feared need no more haunt his imagination. Each tear, as it fell at times down her cheek upon his—each almost repressed sigh—each whisper of comfort when no word was syllabled—and each consoling sentence of wisest words, when her emotion permitted utterance to her calm voice—restored him more and more nearly to his usual tranquillity. A sort of haze hung over the evil that had befallen—its most hideous features were hidden—and all those cheering thoughts arose, which, whencesoever they came, and by whomsoever inspired, are, in times of distress, the sure reward of a virtuous and pious life.

Aunt Isobel now came bustling with her usual mirth and vivacity into the room, but instantly changed her mood and her manner when her eyes met those of Agnes. For the first time in her life had she now seen in these eyes something like an expression of misery, which was not diminished by the faint smile that reluctantly passed over their tears. Could it be, she thought, that Michael had been unkind?—and she turned towards him an almost upbraiding look. But Michael kissed the brow of Agnes, and, putting her hand into that of her guardian—for that was still her deserved name—he earnestly desired the old lady not to be disturbed while he told her of a very great and melancholy misfortune, the details of which he had not yet communicated fully even to his wife.

"The stranger who left the house about an hour ago is a respectable person in trade in Edinburgh; and my unhappy brother, poor Abel, instigated, no doubt, and assisted by that villain Mansell, has forged upon him to a very large amount. Abel has got the money; and unless I repay it, Mr Maxwell will do all he can to discover, apprehend, and bring my brother to punishment; that is, to death—yes, to certain irreprievable death. If I make good the loss he has sustained, he will suffer the affair to rest; Abel will escape this time at least; and we may yet rescue him from destruction." The good old lady sighed deeply, and wiped her eyes, but said not a word, and motioned him to proceed. "At my father's death, which God remove to a distant day, you know this property is mine, burthened with a considerable mortgage, and a small annuity to Abel. We have some outstanding debts due to us; and you know the amount of the fortune my beloved Agnes brought me: all together would no more than repay what Mr Maxwell has lost by my infatuated brother's crime."—"Hush! hush!" said Agnes; "I think I hear my father's footsteps!" They listened; but it had only been the motion of some bird among the withered leaves. "Yes, my dear Agnes, I feel the meaning of your fears—to know all that we know would break the old man's heart. I did not think it necessary to consult you what ought to be done; so, trusting to your approval, I told Mr Maxwell that I would make good what he had lost to the last shilling I possessed, or would possess for years to come. But I

told him that it would certainly kill my father to be told of Abel's crime; so I have become his debtor to the whole amount he desired; and while I continue to pay him the interest, he will not demand the principal till my father's death. Then Dovenest must be sold; and we must seek out, in our poverty, for another habitation."

Michael rose from his seat at the close of these words, and paced hurriedly up and down the room. "Alas! Mrs Irvine, you will think now—it will be impossible for you not to think it—that Agnes Hay has made an unhappy marriage, and that you brought her up so tenderly and so wisely, to become miserable at last. And yet, if I could die for my Agnes—if for her sake I could pour out from my heart every drop it contains—if I could purchase her peace through life by the mutilation of my limbs and miserable decease in a lazar-house"——"O Michael! my husband, what is this I hear? Did you not promise, even now, when you pressed me, as you said, with pride to your bosom, to think nothing of this evil, which, since Abel is to be spared, is no evil at all? No! Michael—it is a blessing—a blessing from that Being who has been most merciful to us all our days—who guarded my orphan head by day and night, and has given me the gift of an humble and contented spirit." And so saying, the beautiful young wife knelt down, and folded her hands beneath her bosom, over the babe that stirred within her, and gave her a foretaste of a mother's joy. "Disturb her not, disturb her not," said her guardian, with sobs that might not be controlled. "Not I—not I was it that taught my Agnes—her virtues are from God, and from God came the lore that putteth to shame all worldly wisdom, and maketh her alike fit for the trials of earth or the reward of heaven."

It was no sudden and transient fit of enthusiasm, but the calm deep movement of piety, that kept Agnes in the attitude of prayer. To the meaning of her words, high as it was, her nature was to be for ever true. No exultation felt she in her submissiveness; it was the strong humility of a perfectly resigned heart. The fair sight breathed a corresponding calm over those who in themselves had not perhaps been so comforted; and, on rising from her knees, she was rewarded by the peace on her husband's face, and the kind eyes of her guardian, that looked on her with a Sabbath smile. And now the old man's footsteps were evidently heard: every cheek was dried, and every voice composed to cheerfulness, when their father entered the room. He put his staff in the usual corner, and said with animation—"Children, I have had a sharp walk, and it is a fine black frost—let us to our meal—for an east wind gives a good appetite, and I think that I may yet live to see another Christmas."

The small round table was now covered with its white cloth, and placed near a blazing root-fire. Agnes, with even more than her usual tenderness, wheeled the old high-backed arm-chair into its place. The old man held up his withered hand, and bowed down his hoary head in a thanksgiving over the frugal repast; and forgetting, or hushing within their hearts, all painful thoughts, the family broke their bread in peace, and there were even smiles sent round the board, which, in spite of that sore distress, was blessed of Heaven.

CHAPTER V.

A SNOW-STORM had been blowing throughout the day from all points of the compass, and huge drifts blocked up almost the roads and paths leading into the valley of the Esk. The family of Dovenest were sitting, somewhat late on a January night, round a blazing fire; nor did the secret, which their hearts had kept from the old man, painful as it was to think upon, prevent them from enjoying much happiness. Indeed, by their constant care to look cheerful at all times in his presence, they had often made themselves really so, when, if left to themselves, they could not but have been oppressed with anxiety and grief. Adam Forester had that night spoken frequently of Abel, and lamented that they did not know where he was; for, said he, "I wished to have sent him a new-year's gift; which he, no doubt, must be sorely in need of. The poor boy has not, I fear, such a comfortable house as we have over his head this wild night—not such a fire as ours to sit by—no, no. Why did he ever leave his father's house?" Soon after these words, the old man fell asleep on his chair, and nothing more was said by anybody to disturb his slumber. Michael took his book; Agnes sat before him at her work, of a kind most affecting to the heart of a young wife; and Aunt Isobel, whom nobody ever saw idle, was moving about the room with noiseless steps, and getting ready the evening meal by the time the old man should awake, which he was sure to do when the clock gave warning before the hour of eight. Early hours, night and morning, were kept at Dovenest, with some variation, both in winter and summer; and from November till the end of March, nine was the hour of evening prayer.

A loud blow struck the door; and then a man dressed in red, like an officer of justice, burst into the room. He looked round, for a few seconds, with a stern smile, and then said—"Ay, ay; you have put Master Abel to bed, I trow; but the bird is not flown—he is in the cage; so, good folks, without more ado, let him be produced. I must do my duty." And he laid down a pair of handcuffs on the table.

Adam, roused from his sleep by that horrid intrusion, kept his eyes fixed in a ghastly stare upon the pitiless wretch, while his withered cheeks were white as ashes.

"Giles Mansell has forged on the Bank of Scotland; and his crony, Abel Forester, your son, old man, is implicated. The brass plates were found in the garret he inhabited, not long since: but no need of palaver; hanging is but hanging; so bring him out, or I must have a search in the rookery."

The old man now knew that Abel was a forger, and saw him on the scaffold. He gave no sigh, no groan, no shudder; but, as if a bar of iron had struck him on the temple, or vapour damp suffocated him, his head fell back, and his features grew rigid, as in the grasp of death. Isobel saw the change, and soon bathed his forehead. But Michael questioned the officer, who, unmoved, without circum-

locution, and in a few plain and dreadful words, repeated the frightful truth.

The miserable father seemed to hear in his swoon; and, raising himself up in his chair, which he was too weak to leave, fastened his eyes once more, as in fascination upon a serpent. "Abel has done many things sore amiss, Mr M'Intyre—for I know your name, sir—but he is no forger;" and the very sound of that fatal word struck on his heart like a knell, while, with his eyes still fixed in dreadful doubt on the officer's dark scowling countenance, and, with a forced smile of hope that passed away over his quivering lips and cheeks, he laid back his white head once more, and uttered one long, dismal, deadly groan of incurable despair.

M'Intyre searched thoroughly the whole house, and then appeared to believe that he had come thither on wrong information. He sat down, laid his loaded pistols on the table, and helped himself to food. Meanwhile, Michael had taken his father in his arms, and, carrying him into his own room, laid him on his bed. He tried to comfort him in his agony; but his father, although he looked on him, did not seem to hear or to understand his words. Agnes came and sat down at the bedside, holding the old man's head between her hands, and Michael returned to the room he had left. M'Intyre was eating greedily, and demanded liquor, which was given. There the fiend sat, with his shaggy eyebrows, coarse features, and sallow complexion, dead to all human misery. The thief-taker had once been a soldier, and had seen much of honourable and dishonourable death. For twenty years—for the wretch's coarse hair was grizzled—it had been his business to prowl about prisons—to lock cells upon guilt and despair—to sit cold as ice beside quaking caitiffs at the bar—and to do hideous work about scaffolds on days of execution. Even he had an idea of duty—inexorable with a warrant—and not to be bribed by the criminal on whom he had set his fangs—gruff and grim in his integrity, that was proof against the silver and gold of those who had been driven to wickedness by want and famine.

"Nae doubt it is hard on your father, sir; but, in time, he'll get ower it like mysel. It's nae secret—a' Scotland kens it—how my ain son, Donald Dhu, rubbed shoulders with the gallows. He had gotten up to be sergeant in the Forty-second—the Auld Black Watch—but a halbert wouldna content my gentleman—he would fain be an ensign; so he forges a bill for four hunder poun'. But his hawse wasna made for hemp: aff gaed Donald across the seas, and was shot through the heart by a black nigger in the West Indies. Anither stoup o' whisky, sir, gin ye please. It's a bitter night—enough to tirr a taed; and I hae been up to the oxters in snaw-pits fifty times, between this and Loanhead."

Michael, who had had time to reflect on the charge against Abel, began to recover his spirits, and to believe that this might be a mistake: at all events, he had no reason to think that his brother was now in Scotland; and, in this belief, he could bear more patiently the presence of the loquacious man of blood. "Weel, weel, man, I'm no sorry that this ne'er-do-weel brither o' yours is no here the nicht. But

dinna think that he'll no be gruppit during this verra moon. Think ye he'll escape a' the thief-takers between the Land's End and John o' Groat's? We're a strong squad. And then there's no a clachan, nor a town, nor a road-side change-house, that hasna a hue-and-cry description o' him by this time—liker than ony painted picture. There they are stuck up on every smiddy door—every cross stane—every gable end—every kirk yett. A fox may as weel think o' rinnin i' the daytime through amang houses, and alang the king's highroad, without being worried by a thousand curs. The hue and cry will gang down into the very coal-pits; and the chimley-soopers will ken him war he to tak a brush ower his shouther, and blacken his face like the deil himsel. But here's to you, sir. This is prime spirit. I'se warrant it's smuggled."

Finding that Michael did not join in the conversation, the officer lighted his pipe, and sat mute and surly, with his huge hand close upon his pistols, till the clock struck twelve, when, with an oath, he started to his feet, and, growling out that he must be at the jail by two o'clock, pocketed his weapons, and faced the storm, still raging furiously, in the starless night. Michael listened at the door, and heard him plunging through the wreathes away down the glen.

Michael's heart, in some degree, revived on the removal of that loathsome reptile, or beast of prey; and just as he was about to go into his father's room, the old man, supported by Agnes and Isobel, came feebly forwards, and requested to be placed in his chair. "O Abel, Abel! why hast thou done this thing? And is there, indeed, no pity for thee among thy fellow-creatures? No; they know not how to pardon each other's sins. But we have not had family worship yet; and it must be done before I take to my bed; for from that bed shall I never be lifted again, till you, Michael, walk at my feet, and lay your father in the only place of rest on this cruel earth." But Michael was not able to read the chapter; so Agnes, stronger than them all in this trial, took the Bible, and read what her father had marked some hours before, with a voice that faltered less and less at every verse, and, at the close, was almost steady as it had been in the morning worship.

A pane in the window that moved on a hinge was stirred, and a well-known whisper said—"Brother—brother!" The old feeble man started like a youth to his feet at the sound of Abel's voice. The door was unlocked; and there, in the midst of them, all drenched with sleet and snow, stood the poor hunted felon. "Kiss me—kiss me, Abel—for I am sick—sick at heart;" and the miserable man laid his icy cheek close to that of his father. Instinctively he supported him to his chair, and knelt down, leaning his head upon his father's knees. "Will not that fearful fiend return against us?" said the old man, looking wildly towards the door; and Michael stood, in his giant strength, before his father and his brother, resolved that not a hair of Abel's head should be touched till he himself was killed. But the officer had obeyed his instructions, and was now miles on his road to Edinburgh.

Abel had, for weeks, suffered more pain, hunger, and cold—more

searching misery of mind and body—than had almost ever fallen to the lot of man; and the relief now yielded, by the very light and heat of the hearth, was felt in his spirit through its frame. They who loved him so dearly would fain have spared him the agony of shame in telling the extent of his delinquencies: all that they desired was to hear from him if he had any hope, if there was any chance of escape. But his sin, his shame, his sufferings, were now all for a time forgotten; for a cold flutter, he said, was tugging at his heart, and he fell down like a corpse upon the floor. His father, who, a few minutes before, was unable to walk across the room unassisted, now raised his son's head with an arm of strength, and, along with Michael, bore him to that bed in which he had slept for so many tranquil and innocent years. Every other fear was lost in that of his immediate dissolution; and the old man expressed his determination to sit by him during the whole night. The lights were soon extinguished—all but one taper—and at dead of midnight there was silence, if not sleep, over all the house.

CHAPTER VI.

Had Adam Forester been even a stern and austere father, instead of one most indulgent and forgiving, the pitiable condition of his son must have softened all judgment of his undutiful transgressions. His guilt had been great, but so had already been its punishment. He had found himself inextricably involved in many dishonest and dangerous practices by Mansell, whose sister he had privately married. That unprincipled person had urged him to the commission of all those acts which had made him amenable to the criminal law, and had indeed so practised upon his easy and credulous nature, as to lead his hand into guilt without even a clear knowledge in his mind that he was perpetrating any crime. Mansell—a man of education and ingenuity—had been an engraver, and had applied his knowledge of that art to the worst purposes. Abel had been made a convenient tool of by his abandoned brother-in-law, and at last found that he had brought himself close to the very edge of destruction. He scarcely knew the exact extent of his own guilt; but he knew that he had been proclaimed a felon, and that the officers of justice had for some time been in search of him on a capital charge. Mansell was somewhere hidden in the wild darkness of London; and Abel's wife was concealing herself in the north of England, till it might be possible for him to elude the keen blood-hounds that were hunting him out, and join her at an appointed place in those secluded regions.

Abel had at last been driven to such extremities in his endeavours to conceal himself, that for a week he had remained, day and night, in one of the old tombs of the Greyfriars churchyard. Now and

then he had come out, like a ghost, from that dreadful asylum, and purchased something to keep him alive. The weather had been intensely cold, and the poor criminal had been sometimes nearly frozen to death. But the love of life—that strong passion—had supported his heart in the very frostiest famine; and the agitation of an unceasing anxiety had made his blood to circulate, when otherwise it would have been congealed through his veins in that open vault, whose only door had sometimes been a drift of snow. In the squalor of his wretchedness, he had at last been afraid to go into any shop to purchase a loaf to devour in his gnawing hunger: eyes looked at him suspiciously, he thought, and people whispered to each other; so that, unable longer to endure that direful imprisonment, he had issued forth in spite of fear, and, in defiance of all emergencies, had found his way in that snow-storm to the house of his father. Some one had, perhaps, known his countenance, and informed the police that he had been seen in the city; or Mr M'Intyre's visit to Dovenest might have been one of those accidental coincidences that often bring guilt to detection, and at all times hang over the workers of iniquity—making, on a sudden, the most safe and secret place dangerous as the lion's den.

His extreme suffering had so worn out both soul and body, that Abel, on his arrival at Dovenest, was at first almost insensible to everything he saw or heard. His very remorse was lost in pain, sickness, and exhaustion; and while his old grey-headed father had embraced him once more, he scarcely knew that he was in the old man's arms. "Let me lie down, father, for I am dead with weariness, cold, hunger, and want of sleep." Adam Forester's strength had seemed miraculously restored on sight of his son. On his shoulders, rather than on Michael's, had the prodigal leaned as he tottered to his bed; at that bed-side his father heard his hurried confession; nor would the old man go to his own rest till Agnes beseeched him with those soft dewy eyes, whose gracious power he could never oppose, and promised to call him up before daylight, with that low and plaintive voice which had never yet asked and been refused, and never would so do until his dying day.

But long before daylight there was Adam Forester sitting by his Abel's bedside. With his own hands had he lighted a fire in the room, and was preparing some food for him when Agnes appeared. A few hours' warm sleep had much restored the miserable man; and, wholly possessed with the feeling of being once more at home—once more a dweller in Dovenest—Abel almost forgot that he was a hunted felon, and that in an hour he might be dragged from his bed, and flung manacled into a dungeon. All the evil of these two last years, whether it were sin or sorrow, guilt or remorse, was banished from his memory—himself of that distracted time had perished away, and he was the innocent Abel of other days, when he had little more to upbraid himself with but a few faults and follies, forgiven as soon as known, and never remembered against him beyond the first evening prayer. Then would he all at once remember what he was now; and as the horrible future appalled him, he wished that

the past might be here peacefully expiated, and his head never more lifted up from that pillow.

Within the last few hours, some of the strongest of all human passions had, with severe force, struck the heart of old Adam Forester; and passions, too, opposite to each other as mid-day and mid-night. These sudden shocks had, for the time, communicated, as it were, a preternatural strength to their victim. But when the final excitation subsided, it left him weak as a reed. He was sensible, before others observed it, that a palsy had crept over him—that his powers of speech were benumbed, and that this must be the finger of death. The change was soon visible to all but Abel; and Michael, Agnes, and Isobel, who had the most nice knowledge of all his looks, gestures, words, and motions, certainly knew that he was fatally stricken. There was no painful distortion to distress their hearts—his speech was not greatly changed; but a mortal weakness overspread face and figure, and there was an expression in his eyes that told the lids would in a few hours be closed. "I am dying, children: let me have all your prayers." Abel had again fallen asleep, and heard not his father's voice.

There was no weeping or lamentation at that deathbed. As the tide of life kept ebbing away, the old man seemed anxious and more anxious about Abel. But his anxiety, although heavier, seemed less painful, and to be nearly akin to hope and trust. They who surrounded him knew well what was meant by each faint single word; they also knew all he wished to hear; and as his dim eyes looked towards them, which of them he expected to speak. "If my Abel has wronged any one, sell this patrimony, Michael, and purchase him life."

Michael had kept one secret from his father; for he knew that, independently of other considerations, old men cannot bear, without severe pain, the thoughts of the property their industry has painfully purchased departing into a stranger's hands after their death; and Adam Forester was not altogether without this failing incident to old age. But now Michael saw that he could give him strong comfort. "Father, fear not for Abel's life. Of this last crime of his associate, he has said that he is wholly innocent; and however suspicious circumstances may be against him, they will all be explained, should he ever be brought to trial. The innocent will not suffer. Other wrong things has Abel done; but, some months ago, I settled the whole with his accuser; and even with this, my patrimony, have I already purchased safety to his life. Not a hair of Abel's head shall be hurt, father—no, not a hair of his head."—"Then can I die happy?" said the old man; and these were his last words. Agnes leaned down her cheek close to his, and was about to smooth his pillow; but she heard no breath, and said calmly to Michael, "Our father is dead."

CHAPTER VII.

In a few weeks it was known throughout the neighbourhood that both Dovenest and Sprinkeld were to be sold. Some people, who pretended to be in the secret, said, that Michael's young wife longed for a town life, and had given him no peace until he had agreed to remove into Edinburgh. Others looked grave, and shook their heads, saying, they had never thought Adam Forester a rich man: that heavy mortgages were on his small property; and that, no doubt, Abel had cost his fond and foolish father much money—the old man having, very reprehensibly, encouraged him in all his extravagance. None knew the real state of the case, although, in a short time, Michael let it be generally understood that he was able, indeed, to pay all his debts; but, after that was done, that he should be but a poor man. Coarse and idle rumours died away in less than one little month; and it was felt by every fireside in the glen, that, when the Foresters left it, it would lose the best family it had contained within the oldest memory. There was no pity felt for them, for they all seemed composed and cheerful shortly after the funeral. Indeed, there are persons—and the Foresters were of that number—who, even in severest trials, are objects of a higher feeling than pity, and appear, in the elevation of misfortune, worthier our envy than our compassion. Towards them all impertinent curiosity is at once quelled by the simple dignity of their demeanour: their condition, whatever it may be, must not be questioned; and although we remain ignorant of their real circumstances, we take the propriety of all their conduct on trust, and follow them in all their unrepining changes with our silent and approving sympathy.

Nor was there now any unhappiness very hard to be endured within the walls of Dovenest. Abel had remained in his concealment till he thought he might venture to attempt his nightly escape over the hill-country into the north of England. His case was desperate; and after many contrite and remorseful confessions, and receiving his brother's entire forgiveness, he went his way, promising to let them hear something of him, if he eluded detection, as soon as prudence would permit. The silence of all rumours concerning him was the best comfort that could be offered to all their hearts; and they were willing to cherish the belief that he had effected his escape beyond seas. That belief was enough. What although they were about to be what is called poor? By that poverty they had probably purchased Abel's life, at a time when it was forfeited, and he himself might have been seized. And what peace could there ever have been at Dovenest again, if, for its sake, Abel had been destroyed? Yet, although soon to leave that beloved place, they did not seek violently to dissever from it their strong affections. They would enjoy it to the last: every day they had yet to remain within its quiet bounds they filled up, from morning to night, with endearing thoughts of its beauty—every little nook was visited and revisited with an unstrained pleasure, gently mingled with an un-

painful regret—every tree that hung its shadow over the hawthorn hedge, upon their own river, they regarded more fondly now that their last spring was adorning its familiar branches; and as they stood beside the dial, they prayed that the hours might throw over it their lingering shadows, that the day of their departure, though fixed, might be as remote as possible; and their last two months extended, in the multitude of their thoughts within them, into the length of a mournful but not unhappy year. To Michael, the prospect of leaving for ever the house in which he had been born, was, perhaps, less disturbing at any time, than it was to Agnes, to know that the scene of her bridal happiness was soon to pass away from her like a dream. Seeing them perfectly resigned, Aunt Isobel lost nothing of her habitual vivacity, and her constant cheerfulness often insinuated itself by an agreeable contagion into their spirits, when, perhaps, they were disposed to despond, and might have yielded to the pressure of natural disappointment and distress. And ere long there was a new inmate within the peaceful dwelling; for a child was born; and Michael and Agnes being now parents, not one single shadow of sorrow could abide round its cradle. Agnes felt it at her bosom—Michael saw its mother smile—and all mere worldly prosperity was, under the power of that sacred instinct, utterly forgotten. Richer were they than tongue could tell, or heart could conceive; and the Sabbath-day on which the infant Lucy was baptised, was the most serenely and perfectly blest day of all their lives, scarcely excepting that on which they had been married.

Michael Forester had fixed upon a plan of life, and had already prepared to carry it into execution. The only master he had ever known was his own father, and that had been always a pleasant servitude. Independent he would still be; and, in so resolving, he felt that he was influenced by an allowable, an honourable pride. A strong man, in the meridian of life, well educated, and not unconscious of his abilities, what had he to fear either for himself or those he loved? Nay, a new spring of happiness seemed to be flowing within his heart, now that a demand was made for exertions that, but for this misfortune, would have been unnecessary, and he looked with a steady and bold eye into futurity. His life at Dovenest, industrious as it had been, almost appeared to him now, in the elation of his hopeful mind, to have been a life of indolence. "I will build another house—I will cultivate other fields—I will become a sitter in another kirk—I will form other connections—not to the forgetfulness of any one thing, place, or person now dear to me; no—no—never shall they cease from my grateful remembrance; but to all those I will add other enjoyments; and my Agnes, if so it pleaseth Heaven, my beautiful Agnes shall be yet happier than ever."

There was a pastoral farm in the parish of Holylee, called Bracken Braes, which had been attached to one still larger several years ago, but which was again to be let by itself, owing to the mismanagement and failure of the tenant. The dwelling-house had been suffered to go almost entirely into decay; but the agent of the rich proprietor, to whom a large district of the country belonged, at once

offered to repair or rebuild it; and Michael, having easily found sureties, took the farm. Aunt Isobel, out of her jointure as a minister's widow, had, during upwards of thirty years, saved three hundred pounds; and Michael knew what was his duty too well to refuse employing that sum in the way that was best for the happiness of the household. The cheerful old lady laughed on confessing her unknown riches; but tears of thankfulness were, at the same time, in her eyes, when she knew what a blessing was now in her little store. So, while Agnes was happy with her infant Lucy at Dovenest, Michael frequently visited Bracken Braes, which was to be ready for them on the 25th of May, when there would be a joyful flitting; ay, joyful, even although it was to be from Dovenest; although that gate which he had so often unlatched was to be closed behind him for the rest of his life.

The house of Bracken Braes, at the end of February, was in ruins. The mossy stone-wall, round what had once been a garden, was in many places fallen down; and here and there the wild sweetbriers seemed to hold it together by their roots and tendrils. In that defaced garden nothing was to be seen but a few gooseberry-bushes in their old age, almost as tall and wide as lilacs. A sheltered bour-tree, and a mountain-ash, dwarfed by the browsing cattle, stood at one gable-end which was yet entire, and a noble plane overshadowed the deserted domicile. The hill-side behind, from which the place took its name, was sprinkled with brackens interspersed with a few hazels; while, here and there, a holly, with its burnished green, brightened the pasture. The other low hills near at hand were smooth and bare; but in the distance was a range of heathery mountains. Several streams, or rather runlets, rose imperceptibly round about; in droughty weather, no doubt, dried up, but now, with the melted snow, clear as diamonds; while a well, even still clearer, and never known to have been dry, green with water-cresses, and resplendent with various vegetable lustre, had lain there, for a good many years, undisturbed by bowl or pitcher, and stirred only by the shaggy hill-ponies, or sportsman lying down to quench his thirst, when in pursuit of the solitary plover.

Poets are fond of building fairy cottages in an oasis in the desert, or perhaps beneath the lake waves, or in groves of air at the rising or setting of golden suns; but here, all transformation, sudden and beautiful as it was, was the work of homely human skill, labouring on the homeliest materials. A small quarry of blue-slate stone, unworked since from it had been built the parish kirk, nearly a century ago, was cleared of brackens, briers, and foxgloves, to the disturbance of nothing but the little shy wren and the old grey hare; and in a week the sledges had laid down beside the ruined walls wherewithal to rebuild up anew their ancient proportions. Michael's own hands dug the foundations, and shaped them into lines even of picturesque beauty—obeying only the character of the ground, and its small jutting angles. The merry masons soon ran up the walls. Several oaks that had been dug up from a neighbouring moss, almost as fresh as when they had sunk in it, furnished the lintels

and the humble roof-tree; a few carts of wheat-straw from the sunny and fertile fields of Stowe were enough to form a thick regular thatch roof, impervious to the thawing snows, or the deluging hill-rains; the trowels covered the low front and gable-ends with a cheerful gleam of whiteness that perhaps the painter might have condemned, but which was to smile on the narrow glen with perpetual sunshine; and there was the homestead of Bracken Braes seen, from foundation-stone to chimney-top, before the second moon had entirely withdrawn her midnight light from the glittering stream of Heriot Water.

The sun, on the 25th of May, rose with so joyful a lustre upon Dovenest, that all its inmates felt it would be worse than vain to be very sorrowful; but even before that joyful lustre had glinted upon the woods of Dryden, Hawthornden, and Roslin, all its inmates had been moving about in the grey and uncertain dawn. They had not been forced to sell their furniture, nor to undergo the mean miseries of a sale. It was soon despatched towards Bracken Braes. Their last meal was taken in Dovenest; and if some tears were shed as they were going down the glen, all eyes were nearly clear before they reached Lasswade. It was rather like a party of pleasure seeking a rural holiday than a family leaving an old home.

"Ay, yonder is our new dwelling-place!" exclaimed Aunt Isobel, as, during one of the cool hours before evening, the little cavalcade turned round a green mound that had hidden Bracken Braes. "Look yonder, my jewel; will not your cradle rock pleasantly yonder like a bit nest on the shady bough?" and she raised up the baby in her arms, that certainly smiled an answer to her cheerful nurse. In a few minutes Michael took Agnes in his arms, and welcomed her with a kiss to their new habitation; and there she stood more beautiful and beloved than even on that afternoon when they first told to each other their pure affection. To Agnes the scene around her was far more than enchantment. Her husband had spoken of the place in measured praise, fearing it might not please after Dovenest. But it was so different from that spot, in its simple pastoral beauty, that Agnes loved it at once, without any comparisons, for its own sake. In silent joy she walked with her husband—Aunt Isobel behind them, cherishing and singing to the infant—up the avenue that winded round a knoll to the front of the cottage. There, on each side of the sloping banks, were the very self-same rose-trees that had flourished so richly at Dovenest—many of the very self-same flowers—and a few shrubs that had been especial favourites. "They are taking kindly to the soil already," said Michael. "But here—here," cried Aunt Isobel, "here is the prettiest flower of them all—my own little Lucy Forester, the primrose of Bracken Braes.

For a couple of hours Aunt Isobel was quite in her element, arranging everything within doors and without—insisting, all the time, that Agnes should not fatigue herself, but remain with her Lucy on the seat beneath the plane-tree. The parlour was soon furnished, if not with the same orderly neatness which it received next day, very passably at least, considering all the hurry and con-

fusion; and it was needful it should be so, for a party of visitors were already at the gate.

The clergyman of the parish and his sober-suited sister, Mr and Miss Kennedy, and with them several of the most respectable neighbours (among others, Peter Tait, the formal and pragmatical schoolmaster), had come, by Michael's appointment, to give a welcome to their new parishioners at Bracken Braes. Agnes and Aunt Isobel, each in her own pleasant way, received their unexpected guests, who had not come unprovided; and a tea-party was soon laughing and talking in the parlour. By-and-by the twilight softly darkened their faces, and the night-hawk was heard without, whirring at intervals his monotonous song, now close at hand, and now from the other side of the glen. The kind visitors, with a warmth like that of ancient friendship, said farewell beneath the still shadow of the plane; and the family, in another hour, had all thankfully gone to rest in their new dwelling.

CHAPTER VIII.

Six quiet and laborious years, every week and month of which had, no doubt, contained its own little interesting incidents, had brought the farm of Bracken Braes to the perfection of pastoral beauty. Many a cold marsh, with its long unprofitable rushes, had been converted into the hard firm sod, on which the sheep lay with their lambs on the daisied herbage. Unseen turf-fences went winding along the foot of every eminence, and even round and round the lower hills, subdividing the whole farm into picturesque enclosures. Small spots of rye and barley were visible among the heather; the turnip-field showed its richer verdure beside the stony slope of the uplands; and down in the haughs, on the water-side, bloomed the white and purple clover, protected by thick thorn-hedges from the cattle browsing on the old lea adjacent to the homestead. That homestead looked now almost like a building of other years: the thatch had received its weather stains—the most beautiful of colouring; but little of the walls below the eaves could be discerned through the roses, that clustered more thickly round the large vine-like leaves of the Virgin's Bower; the very shrubberies now cast their shadows; and the old plane-tree itself, that seemed to have reached its growth a quarter of a century before, had extended its branches beyond the roof, and darkened the parlour twilight. Every bare nook about the place was now overgrown; every mark of the labour that had created cottage, garden, and avenue was hidden; all the little stone-walls were covered with moss and wild creepers; the lanes leading away to neighbours' house, sheep-fold, shieling, or peat-moss, were adorned with furze and hawthorns; and the character of the whole small territory was that of completed cultivation, denoting comfort and independence.

Not only had Michael Forester prospered in his worldly circumstances, and gained the esteem of the whole parish, but during these six years there had never been an hour of much anxiety at his fireside. Agnes Hay—for he always called his wife by her own sweet name—had been to him all that he desired. Agnes certainly was not what could be called a very active or ruling housewife, for gentleness and serenity were the prevailing qualities of her disposition, and she allowed the stream of life quietly to murmur by in her contentment. There was no waste—no extravagance—no carelessness under her mild domestic dominion; but her arrangements were all noiseless in their regularity, and proceeded in the spirit of peace. If there was any one thing in which she ever upbraided herself for being too expensive, it was in the article of dress. But her husband, although a plain and almost austere man in all his habits, thought Agnes Hay the most beautiful being on earth, and in that beauty he placed all his pride. It needed not many ornaments, but it could bear some, without any diminution of its matronly and maidenlike simplicity. Michael himself worked at every sort of labour, and in all weather; but there was no need for Agnes to perform any other tasks but such as suited her somewhat delicate health; and when he came home from the hill, and found her sitting at her needle, dressed as he desired, and with Lucy at her work too beside her knee, he felt his whole nature not only supported, but purified by the cheerful presence of so much beauty, innocence, and affection. At evening he saw those for whom he had been toiling during the day, and a feeling far profounder than pride or admiration was constantly in his heart whenever he left or entered the humble porch. An undisturbed quiet was for ever in his house, broken only by the sharp shrill voice of Aunt Isobel, who liked to speak in an upper key, or by her footsteps still quick as those of girlhood, and, sweetest of all sounds, by the prattle and the singing of his Lucy, in features the very image of her mother, but the most gleesome of children, and wild as the fawn in the wood. Yet, in the midst of all her mirth, Lucy would fall hush in a moment at her mother's voice, and all the smiles nearly disappear in the composed cheerfulness of her eyes and forehead. Then those golden clusters lay still upon her fair temples. The child, at the bidding of her mother's eye, would take up her book—perhaps the Bible—and read; or in employment equally religious, with her little hands would set the house in order against her father's return, and arrange upon the table his frugal meal. Whether the lark or the linnet sung or were mute in the open air, within there was at all times a music that never was heard with weariness, and in the darkest of days there was thus a sunbeam in the house.

Lucy was only six years old, but bold as a fairy—she had gone by herself a thousand times about the braes, and often upon errands to houses two or three miles distant. What had her parents to fear? The footpaths were all firm, and led through no places of danger, nor are infants of themselves incautious when alone in their pastimes. Lucy went singing into the coppice-woods, and singing

she reappeared on the open hill-side. With her small white hand on the rail, she glided along the wooden bridge, or, lightly as the ouzel, tripped from stone to stone across the shallow streamlet. The creature would be away for hours, and no fears felt on her account by any one at home—whether she had gone with her basket under her arm to borrow some articles of household use from a neighbour, or merely for her own solitary delight, wandered off to the braes to play among the flowers, coming back laden with wreaths and garlands. With a bonnet of her own sewing to shade her pretty face from the sun, and across her shoulders a plaid, in which she could sit dry during an hour of the heaviest rain beneath the smallest bield, Lucy passed many long hours in the daylight, and thus knew, without thinking of it, all the topography of that pastoral solitude, and even something of the changeful appearances in the air and sky.

The happy child had been invited to pass a whole day, from morning to night, at Ladyside (a farmhouse about two miles off) with her playmates the Maynes, and she left home about an hour after sunrise. She was dressed for a holiday; and father, and mother, and Aunt Isobel, all three kissed her sparkling face before she set off by herself, and stood listening to her singing, till her small voice was lost in the murmur of the rivulet. During her absence, the house was silent, but happy; and the evening being now far advanced, Lucy was expected home every minute; and Michael, Agnes, and Isobel, went to meet her on the way. They walked on and on, wondering a little, but in no degree alarmed, till they reached Ladyside, and heard the cheerful din of the imps within still rioting at the close of the holiday. Jacob Mayne came to the door; but on their kindly asking why Lucy had not been sent home before daylight was over, he looked painfully surprised, and said that she had not been at Ladyside.

Agnes suddenly sat down, without speaking one word, on the stone seat beside the door, and Michael, supporting her, said—"Jacob, our child left us this morning at six o'clock, and it is now near ten at night. God is merciful; but perhaps Lucy is dead." Jacob Mayne was an ordinary, commonplace, and rather ignorant man; but his heart leapt within him at these words, and by this time his own children were standing about the door. "Yes, Mr Forester, God is merciful; and your daughter, let us trust, is not dead. Let us trust that she yet liveth; and without delay let us go to seek the child." Michael trembled from head to foot, and his voice was gone; he lifted up his eyes to heaven, but it seemed not as if he saw either the moon or the stars. "Run over to Raeshaw, some of you," said Jacob, "and tell what has happened. Do you, Isaac, my good boy, cross over to a' the towns on the Innerleithen side; and, O Mr Forester, Mr Forester! dinna let this trial overcome you sae sairly;" for Michael was leaning against the wall of the house, and the strong man was helpless as a child. "Keep up your heart, my dearest son," said Isobel, with a voice all unlike her usual; "keep up your heart, for the blessed bairn is, beyond doubt,

somewhere in the keeping of the great God—yea, without a hair of her head being hurt. A hundred things may have happened her, and death not among the number. Oh! no—no—surely not death—that would indeed be too dreadful a judgment!" and Aunt Isobel, oppressed by the power of that word, now needed the very comfort that she had in vain tried to bestow.

Within two hours a hundred people were traversing the hills in all directions, even to a distance which it seemed most unlikely that poor Lucy could have reached. The shepherds and their dogs, all night through, searched every nook—every stony and rocky place—every little shaw—every piece of taller heather—every crevice that could conceal anything alive or dead; but no Lucy was there. Her mother, who for a while seemed inspired with supernatural strength, had joined in the search, and, with a quaking heart, looked into every brake, or stopped and listened to shout and hollo reverberating among the hills, if she could seize on some tone of recognition or discovery. But the moon sank; and then all the stars, whose increased brightness had for a short time supplied her place, all faded away, and then came the grey dawn of morning, and then the clear brightness of day, and still Michael and Agnes were childless. "She has sunk into some mossy or miry place," said Michael to a man near him, into whose face he never looked. "A cruel, cruel death for one like her; the earth on which my child walked has closed over her, and we shall never see her more!"

At last a man, who had left the search and gone in a direction towards the high-road, came running, with something in his arms, towards the place where Michael and others were standing beside Agnes, who lay apparently exhausted almost to dying on the sward. He approached hesitatingly; and Michael saw that he carried Lucy's bonnet, clothes, and plaid. It was impossible not to see some spots of blood upon the frill that the child had worn round her neck. "Murdered—murdered," was the one word whispered or ejaculated all around; but Agnes heard it not, for, worn out by that long night of hope and despair, she had fallen asleep, and was perhaps seeking her lost Lucy in her dreams.

Isobel took the clothes, and, narrowly inspecting them with eye and hand, said, with a fervent voice, that was heard even in Michael's despair—"No; Lucy is yet among the living. There are no marks of violence on the garments of the innocent—no murderer's hand has been here. These blood-spots have been put there to deceive. Besides, would not the murderer have carried off these things? For what else would he have murdered her? But, O foolish despair! what speak I of? For wicked as this world is—ay, desperately wicked—there is not, on all the surface of the wide earth, a hand that would murder our child! Is it not plain as that sun in heaven that Lucy has been stolen by some wretched gypsy beggar, and that, before that sun has set, she will be saying her prayers in her father's house, with all of us upon our knees beside her, or with our faces prostrate upon the floor?"

Agnes opened her eyes and beheld Lucy's bonnet and plaid lying

close beside her, and then a silent crowd. Her senses all at once returned to her, and she rose up—"Ay, sure enough, drowned—drowned—drowned; but where have you laid her? Let me see our Lucy, Michael; for in my sleep I have already seen her laid out for burial." The crowd quietly dispersed, and horse and foot began to scour the country. Some took the high-roads, others all the bypaths, and many the trackless hills. Now that they were in some measure relieved from the horrible belief that the child was dead, the worst other calamity seemed nothing, for hope brought her back to their arms. Agnes had been able to walk to Bracken Braes; and Michael and Isobel sat by her bedside. Lucy's empty little crib was just as the child had left it the morning before, neatly made up with her own hands, and her small red Bible was lying on the pillow.

"O my husband!—this is being indeed kind to your Agnes; for much it must have cost you to stay here: but had you left me, my silly heart had ceased to beat altogether; for it will not lie still even now that I am well-nigh resigned to the will of God." Michael put his hand on his wife's bosom, and he felt her heart beating as if it were a knell. Then, ever and anon, the tears came gushing, for all her strength was gone, and she lay at the mercy of the rustle of a leaf or a shadow across the window. And thus hour after hour passed on till it was again twilight.

"I hear footsteps coming up the brae," said Agnes, who had for some time appeared to be slumbering; and, in a few moments, the voice of Jacob Mayne was heard at the outer door. It was no time for ceremony, and he advanced into the room where the family had been during all that trying and endless day. Jacob wore a solemn expression of countenance; and he seemed, from his looks, to bring them no comfort. Michael stood up between him and his wife, and looked into his heart. Something there seemed to be in his face that was not miserable. If he has heard nothing of my child, thought Michael, this man must care but little for his own fireside. "O speak, speak!" said Agnes; "yet why need you speak? All this has been but a vain belief, and Lucy is in heaven."—"Something like a trace of her has been discovered: a woman with a child, that did not look like a child of hers, was last night at Clovenford, and left it by the dawning."—"Do you hear that, my beloved Agnes?" said Isobel: "she'll have tramped away with Lucy up into Ettrick or Yarrow; but hundreds of eyes will have been upon her, for these are quiet, but not solitary glens; and the hunt will be ever long before she has crossed down upon Hawick. I knew that country in my young days. What say ye, Mr Mayne? there's the light of hope on your face."—"There's nae reason to doubt, ma'am, that it was Lucy. Everybody is sure o't. If it was my ain Rachel, I should hae nae fear o' seeing her this blessed nicht."

Jacob Mayne now took a chair, and sat down, with even a smile upon his countenance. "I may tell you, noo, that Watty Oliver kens it was your bairn, for he saw her limping after the limmer at Gala Brig; but hacing nae suspicion, he didna tak a second leuk o' her; but ae leuk is sufficient, and he swears it was bonny Lucy

Forester." Aunt Isobel, by this time, had bread and cheese, and a bottle of her own elder-flower wine, on the table. "You have had a long and hard journey, wherever you have been, Mr Mayne; take some refreshment:" and Michael asked a blessing. Jacob saw that he might now venture to reveal the whole truth. "No, no, Mrs Irvine, I am ower happy to eat or to drink. You are a' prepared for the blessing that awaits you; your bairn is no far off; and I mysel—for it was I mysel that found her—will bring her by the han', and restore her to her parents." Agnes had raised herself up in her bed at these words, but she sunk gently back on her pillow; Aunt Isobel was rooted to her chair; and Michael, as he rose up, felt as if the ground were sinking under his feet.

There was a dead silence all round the house for a short space, and then the sound of many joyful voices, which again, by degrees, subsided. The eyes of all then looked, and yet feared to look, towards the door. Jacob Mayne was not as good as his word, for he did not bring Lucy by the hand to restore her to her parents; but, dressed again in her own bonnet, and her own gown, and her own plaid, in rushed their child, by herself, with tears and sobs of joy; and her father laid her within her mother's bosom.

CHAPTER IX.

Jacob Mayne had not, perhaps, either felt more or exerted himself more than his other neighbours on the occasion of Lucy's disappearance; but her parents continued to entertain towards him an especial gratitude. His was the first sympathy they had received, and he it was that rescued Lucy from that cruel gypsy. Henceforth they could never see him without emotion; and, as he was a worthy man, a lasting friendship was cemented between the families of Bracken Braes and Ladyside. Jacob, whose wife was living—a quiet homely woman—had one son, a boy of surprising abilities, now about ten years, and two daughters, only a year or two older than Lucy. They were her chief companions; but the girl that Lucy loved most, as she grew up, was Mary Morrison, of Ewebank, the only daughter of a widower. Ewebank was farther off than Ladyside, and, indeed, in another parish. Even that imaginary distinction helps to keep families apart more than distance; and, in this case, a range of hills that might almost be called mountains intervened; so that Lucy did not see Mary Morrison oftener than perhaps once a-month, on an average, through the whole year. But there was something in the nature of these two young happy creatures, that, all unknown to themselves, knit their hearts to each other. Lucy thought there was no face among all her other friends nearly so delightful as the meek face of Mary Morrison; and Mary, who was rather the elder of the two, sometimes contrived an excuse for a walk over to the Heriot

Water, merely to see the joyful smiles of Lucy Forester. Mary lived in a very lonesome house, with a father who, no doubt, loved, but who was far from being gentle towards her; and the thought of the cheerful parlour of Bracken Braes often brought the tear to her eye, when she looked at the hill-range that separated it from the dull solitude of Ewebank.

Jacob Mayne had a brother—a man of some property—who had lost his wife and only son many years ago. Jacob himself had had severe struggles with the world, and was now far from being prosperous. He could live, and clothe, and educate his children decently; but that was all. He had not been able to lay by a single shilling, and scarcely any new article of furniture had come into the house for a good many years. Perhaps he was somewhat soured in his temper by this continued poverty; and what occasionally still more depressed him, was the total cessation of all intercourse between himself and his brother, owing to one of those fatal quarrels which, beginning in the merest trifles, unintelligible to all persons but the parties themselves, eventually alienate affection, and leave those who in youth slept in the same bed, to travel down, angrily and apart, to the grave. Michael Forester had endeavoured to reconcile them, but in vain; and he had even so offended Jacob Mayne by his interference, that, for a short time, their familiar friendship had been disturbed. The children, however, had always continued to play with each other, and, while that is the case, the parents wait an opportunity for reconcilement; while Agnes Hay, who had been a peacemaker ever since she had come into the parish, had done so many delicate kindnesses to Jacob's wife, that at last, one day at the kirk, Jacob came cordially up to the group, among whom Michael was standing during the ringing of the bell, and entered into conversation with him about the concerns of both their houses.

About two years after Lucy's adventure, there was a deep sensation sent through every household, by the discovery of a sacrilegious crime perpetrated by a man who, up to the time of that wretched wickedness, had borne the highest character for probity and religion—no other than this wealthy brother of Jacob Mayne. The unhappy man was an elder; and had been observed by a poor old woman, who had sat down, unobserved, to rest herself in a shade close to the church gate, to take money out of the poor's plate, and secrete it about his person. The pauper watched him several Sabbaths, and at last issued out of her concealment, and suddenly charged him with his guilt, to which she said she had frequently before been an eyewitness. In the tribulation of detected sacrilege, Richard Mayne had not a word to speak. The fierce old crone cried out against him till her voice was heard in the kirk; and, before a crowd of people who would all have disbelieved her as a maniac, the elder confessed his guilt, and demanded to be led to prison.

The very horror of the crime quelled, in all hearts, any desire of punishment. It shook the whole parish like an earthquake, and there was a disturbed silence in every house. Who might dare to say he could stand fast, when Richard Mayne had fallen under the

temptation of Mammon, whom it now appeared he had served, and not the living God? Miserable man! what to him was money—the money of the poor? His wife and his son—they slept in the grave; and for himself, who was more abstemious than he—who more temperate—and who, until this hidden sacrilege, in all his dealings more rigidly just? And of what had Richard Mayne, the rich elder, during the unknown length of his crime, robbed the few paupers in the parish—that palsied widow and three other aged women, bedridden or tottering on crutches—the two cripples, one so afflicted from his youth, and the other crushed at his work by a falling stone—and him, that harmless creature, to whom reason had been denied? Perhaps, altogether, a few pounds, the loss of which had been felt in their salt and their meal, in their miserable daily dole, by the palsied, the blind, the lame, and the lunatic. Jacob Mayne, oppressed with shame, absented himself, with all his family, from the kirk—shut himself up in his house, round which no figure was seen moving—and no one, for a time, went near the abode of the greyheaded worker of iniquity, nor knew whether he was alive or dead. Mr Kennedy, the minister, had indeed gone to his house, and knocked at the door; but a low miserable voice told him to go away; and as he looked up, on his departure, to a window, he beheld the countenance of Richard Mayne, as if it were that of an evil spirit already undergoing its punishment. His only domestic had never returned to the house since that Sunday; nor had any smoke been seen since then from his chimney. Pity had not yet begun to work—at least not outwardly—in any human heart towards this great sinner. Even his brother yet stood aloof.

One night, after Isobel and Lucy had gone to rest, Agnes said—"O Michael! will you not go and see the wretched old man—if he be indeed in life? This misery must be more than he can bear." The summer fire had been for some time dead on the hearth, but the bright moonlight filled the room, and the door was not yet latched. A shadow fell on the floor as Agnes was speaking, and Richard Mayne himself was in their presence. Long and rueful was the old man's confession; and Michael now thought that he descried in him, what, before the crime, he had never noticed, although, no doubt, it had then existed—a manifest taint of insanity. In all his remorse—and it had worn him to the bone—his haggard eyes still gleamed when he spoke of the coins he had stolen from the poor; and betrayed, in a crafty and suspicious leer, the passion of the miser. The old man wept when Michael told him, great as had been his crime, to hope for mercy; but as he wept, he bitterly accused his brother of hard-hearted cruelty; and, with a tremulous voice, swore before his Maker that he would leave anything he had past that family. "I have always received more kindness from you, Mr Forester, than any other man in the parish, and I have made my will in your favour. Yes, I have made my will—I have indeed made my will—a good hundred pound to the poor—and the rest, in money and bonds, to you, sir; for you often called in upon me, and were a moderate man in all your bargains. But I have not long to

live; and to-morrow I will show myself at market, and next Lord's day I will show myself at church. God grant that she be not there who saw these withered hands robbing the widow and the fatherless; yet there she cannot be, for they tell me she is dead; and, O sir, does not her ghost come every midnight, and stand, pointing and laughing, with a palsied hand, with bleared eyes, on the old white-headed Judas Iscariot on his straw?"

Michael, in the morning, conducted back the unhappy old man to his own house, and got a person to take care of him for the short time he had to live. At church and market, however, Richard Mayne appeared. Few remained near him, even as if he had been an infectious lazar. His brother had, for the first time, that Sabbath attended Divine service; but he left the kirk with his family by a door at the other end from that where the excommunicated elder sat; and as he never even looked up, it is supposed he did not see the old man. In a few weeks Richard Mayne died, and Michael Forester gave orders about his funeral. His brother received an intimation of it, but did not attend. Nobody was asked to be present but the bearers; and Mr Kennedy and Michael Forester let down the coffin, and said—"Dust to dust!"

It was soon known over all the parish that the unhappy man had left all his property to Mr Forester. In a few days Jacob Mayne came over to Bracken Braes, and sat down with a face of angry determination. "I have been a poor man all my life, Mr Forester; and, thank God, with a clear conscience and a well-behaved family, I can submit to poverty for the few years I have to live. Much good may my brother's money do you, Mr Forester; but the love of money is said in Scripture to be the root of all evil, and it was so with my brother Richard. For ourselves, sir, we were all tolerably well off at Ladyside before you came among us; and we can live, although our families shall henceforth be strangers. You understand me, Mr Forester. As for you, Mrs Forester, I have always respected you—ay, your face was always welcome in our house. But this injustice has struck deep, and I could curse the hour in which I was born." With these words, Jacob raised himself upon his staff, and said—"Here I shake the dust off my shoes—let us never more speak in this world."

Michael Forester had gone into his own room during Jacob's speech, and now returned with some parchments in his hand.

"Jacob, this is your poor brother's will;" and so saying, he put it into the fire, which was burning briskly on a somewhat chill evening. "You are your brother's natural and only heir, my worthy friend; and the property he knew not how to use (but you must think on him with the deepest pity, for he was not in his sound mind), may it for many years prove a blessing to you all at Ladyside."

CHAPTER X.

What a blessed change from a long lot of poverty, in which the wants and necessities of each day are with difficulty supplied, leaving to-morrow and all its uncertain demands unprovided for, and still lowering upon the anxious foresight, to such a competency of this world's goods as sets the hearts of parents free, at once and for ever, from all anxieties but those that must in every condition attend upon their children's conduct—their errors or their well-doing! It is a blessing felt over all our moral nature, to know that our board, however frugal, can be duly spread in security and peace; and that, should we be called away on a short warning, those whom we leave behind us will not fall away from comfort into any destitution. Domestic virtue is almost only another name for domestic peace; and, although assuredly many bear extremest penury, not only without detriment to their character, but to its purification and increased vigour, yet, with people in general, extreme abasement of condition does mournfully abase the soul, and even our natural affections themselves pine and dwindle in that cold and cheerless atmosphere.

This truth was now gratefully felt by the family of the Maynes. Now that his mind was relieved from that trouble of anxiety about his wife and children, which had more or less disturbed him by day and night, almost from the year of his marriage, Jacob Mayne saw distinctly the duties he had either neglected altogether, or very imperfectly performed. He reflected, with surprise and sorrow, on his fretful and irritable temper, that had so often made the house unhappy—on his unreasonable demands on his wife and children, who, do what they would, never could please him—on causeless quarrels among those who yet loved one another—on many long evenings of silent dissatisfaction, more painful in retrospect than the angriest contentions—and, above all, on his unpardonable, his unchristian conduct to his brother, with whom he had cherished an inveterate dissension, and had suffered to lead that unbefriended and lonesome life that had finally preyed, as it would now seem, on his very reason, till, under the power of a diseased passion, he perpetrated a crime that was expiated on earth by death and infamy. To these, and many other such thoughts, his mind and his heart now gave a ready entrance; and he confessed, in sincere contrition, all his manifold errors to Michael Forester, whose noble character, in spite of all the best means and opportunities of knowledge, he had grievously misunderstood, and whom he had not hesitated to accuse to his face of hypocrisy and injustice.

But there was no reason why honest Jacob should not in due time forget his errors. His hard-working wife now wore a smiling face, that reminded him of what it was long ago, when he crossed the moors to visit her at her father's house. His girls could now show themselves at church or market with the very best in the parish, nor yet subject their parents to a charge of extravagance; and, above all, his son Isaac, the pride of the countryside, could now be sent

to college, and become a scholar. Nor was Jacob, bad judge as he was of such matters, deceived in this; for his son was indeed a boy of surpassing genius—a boy of many thousand—born although he was of such very ordinary people, and without one single advantage—working in the fields, even at that tender age, during most of the hours that he could spare from the parish school. His vacations had been little else than a month's bodily toil; but nature had lavished upon him her choicest mental gifts; and, in his ample forehead and full clear eyes, there was apparent the expression of an extraordinary intellect. Michael Forester approved of the plan of sending him to college; and accordingly, before he had perfected his twelfth year, Isaac Mayne, the pale-faced thoughtful scholar of Ladyside, left, for the first time, the farmhouse in which he was born, and, without friend or patron, entered with enthusiasm on his academical career.

On the death of Richard Mayne, Michael Forester was made an elder, and thus was brought more frequently into immediate intercourse with Mr Kennedy. Michael had always been a respected guest at the manse; but he knew his own situation, and kept it. Mr Kennedy was a man of literary habits, and had also, for some years, employed his leisure hours in educating the sons of several of the neighbouring gentry. Michael never intruded himself upon his minister's retirement; but they often met, notwithstanding, and might be said to have been on a footing of friendship ever since Michael came to Bracken Braes. Nor are there any purer sweeteners of our mortal lot than those calm and tempered friendships that, while they scarcely seem to constitute any sensible portion of our life, do yet shed their perpetual influence over it all, keeping alive, within hearts that feel each other's worth, all the best human affections, unimpaired by distance or by time, and ready, on the slightest call of duty, to rise up from their silent harbour, and display their strength in the most disinterested and arduous exertions.

Michael's duty, as an elder, took him more than formerly into the houses of his brother parishioners, most frequently in company with Mr Kennedy, but often alone; and sometimes, too, his wife and daughter went with him when his visits were to the sick or the poor: nor was Aunt Isobel ever found absent when she could be a comfort by fire or bed side. Thus Lucy, who had now reached her tenth year, had her wild spirits tamed down by the knowledge of duty and distress. As quiet and still were all the pretty creature's motions in a sick-room, as they were dancing and gleesome on the greensward. The smiles that were native to her eyes were not the smiles of heartless levity, that soon cease to charm even on the face of beautiful childhood, but they were the smiles of an involuntary joyfulness she could not help, and never tried to cherish, intermingled as it was by nature with the innocence of a guileless heart. The more love she gave away, the more did love overflow within her bosom. She loved her father, her mother, Aunt Isobel, Isaac Mayne, his sisters, his parents—all with a different affection; and meek Mary Morrison, who dwelt beyond all the braes, for her she kept, as it were,

a secret corner of her heart, where none other entered but she; and if weeks and months passed by, and no Mary Morrison came over to Bracken Braes, yet still the unobscured image of that sweet girl was almost the same as her living self; and often, often did Lucy commune with it sitting in her parlour, or beneath the shadow of the plane, or by some little clear spring among the hills, whither she had gone to bring home the water-cresses, or to see what was now the number of the spring lambs. Little as Lucy had seen or heard, that little was all pure and good, or it was the purifying grief that follows repentant guilt; so that, although a mere child, she was in her innocence wiser than she knew, and had learned to look even with a thoughtful eye both on human joy and human affliction.

Never, even in her happiest pastimes, was Lucy disinclined to go with her father or mother to the hut of Elspeth Riddel the widow, who had been a widow, and had lost all her twelve children, upwards of thirty years ago. Close to the side of that frail image, now upwards of ninety years old, would Lucy stand, with upward eyes swimming in reverent pity, while the long locks, white as the driven snows, hung over the golden glow of the maiden's tresses, that changed their lustre at every motion of her head. Lucy, at her bidding, would read the Bible in that lonely hut; and Elspeth said, that, although somewhat deaf now, she never lost a word of that low, sweet, distinct voice. Garden flowers, too, she would often take to that hut; and Elspeth, dim as her eyes were, knew them all by name in a moment; for, long before even Lucy's father was born, had she often gathered such flowers as these for the bosoms of pretty maidens like Lucy herself, who had all, long since, gone down in old age to the grave. "Ay, ay, Mrs Forester, I have seen generation after generation, and bonny faces are for ever passing away on the earth, but a bonnier face than that o' your ain Lucy saw I never in a' my lang days, and that I say before hersel, for the lassie that will come and speak comfort to an auld forgotten ruin o' a human creature like me, may be telt, without scaith, o' her beauty, perfect as it is, like the beauty o' the rose of Sharon."

Often, too, did Lucy visit Mooredge—a house only less solitary than that of Elspeth Riddel, whose hut, indeed, had no name, a mere turf-shieling, that had been built in a single day. In the comfortable cottage of Mooredge lived Allan Laidlaw and his wife, now a cheerful couple, although the very summer when the Foresters came into the parish, their three sons had been drowned in attempting to cross a ford of the Tweed, when the river was in flood. To hear these old people laughing and talking, one would have thought that they had never been acquainted with grief; but Lucy had often seen them when no smiles were in the house, and when both Mr Kennedy and her father, who had come there to pray with them, declared, that from such perfect resignation as theirs, they would carry comfort to their own homes, but that they could add nothing to such a frame of spirit. "It is not time that cures our sorrows, Mr Kennedy," would the old woman say; "for time would weary, and waste out, and distract the souls of us mortal creatures. No, no, it is not time, Mr Forester; for as plainly, as clearly, as distinctly

do I see now the faces of my three drowned boys, as I saw them on that day when they were dragged out of the cruel waters; and if me and Allan had no other comfort, long ere this hour would we baith hae gane down in sorrow to our graves."

Thus passed the days of Michael Forester and his family. Ten years it was since they had left Dovenest; and although they had their share of those ordinary anxieties and sorrows that will pass over the surface of the calmest life, yet during all these ten years they had known only one miserable night and day, when they feared that Lucy had been lost or dead. And what gratitude could ever repay such happiness? What if severest trials awaited them, had they not been the favourites of Heaven, and had they not reason humbly to trust that in their lives their Maker was well pleased?

CHAPTER XI.

It was the cheerful season of bark-peeling, and Michael Forester had been for several weeks employed in felling a pretty extensive wood, about five miles from Heriot Water, on the edge of the Hirst—a large and old estate belonging to a branch of the Cranstouns. Michael had many persons of both sexes and all ages working under him; and not contented with being merely an overlooker, he had the axe frequently in his own powerful hand, and thus added to his other gains the wages of a labourer, always high in that severe and dexterous employment. Sometimes he slept all night in a shieling in the wood; and on these occasions Lucy would come tripping over the hills, and try to surprise her father by laughing in at the door, even before he had left his heather bed in the first glow of sunlight. She carried to him, in her basket, provisions for the day; remained near him till twilight among the fallen trees; and more than once, indeed, she had stayed with him all night in the shieling.

It happened that Michael Forester had been detained in the wood for two successive nights, and therefore the whole family, Agnes, Aunt Isobel, Lucy, and their three days' visitor, Mary Morrison, determined to pay him a visit at his work, and bring him home with them in the evening to Bracken Braes. They took with them what would be considered quite a feast in the forest; and Aunt Isobel selected a bottle of the choicest cowslip wine, of that celebrated vintage which had proved victorious over all competition at an annual meeting of the Edinburgh Horticultural Society. Lucy said she had selected a dining-room on a spot of ground smooth as velvet, near a spring, over which the huge arm of a fallen oak hung like a canopy, that now and then fluttered in the breeze, and tempered to a pleasant coolness the strongest heat of the sun. "There will you three sit—father, mother, and Aunt Isobel—while Mary and I will wait at table, and, if you please, sing you a song

when you are drinking your wine." Lucy and Mary Morrison carried between them the basket of provisions covered with its white cloth; and thus they stepped cheerfully along over hill and hollow, often hurrying far before, and often loitering far behind Agnes and Aunt Isobel, who took their own good time, not caring if they should not reach the wood till one o'clock, the hour at which their table was to be spread in that wilderness.

The little party, under the guidance of Lucy, penetrated, not without some difficulties in their way, into the heart of the wood, which covered nearly thirty acres. "What a change since yesterday!" exclaimed Lucy; "I saw naething o' that brae and that wee bit bonnie glen yestreen. The auld oaks, as they fa', let many a secret place come into the open light. Waes me for a' the birds and their nests—there's a poor shilfa mourning for her young." Michael beheld them all approaching with a pleased surprise, and left his axe in a wide gap across the stem of a noble oak that reached nearly to its heart's core, and would soon prostrate the giant with the earth. It was, indeed, now the hour of rest and refreshment, and all the clashing and crushing sounds ceased in the forest. "This way, father—this way, father," cried the joyful Lucy; "all of you follow Mary Morrison and me, for we are going to lay the table-cloth in the Queen Fairy's own dining-room; and long before the moonlight we will leave it, without disturbing any of the furniture, to herself and her silent people."

"Remember, lassie, that we are not all so young as yourself. Here am I, an auld woman of threescore and seven—for ten has a fearful sound—and I have walked five good miles without crutch or staff. Come hither, Lucy, like a bit roe as you are, and give me your arm to lean on while I take my breath on this branch. Preserve us! what a thickness o' moss, and what soft, grey, blue, red, yellow—ay, all the seven colours o' the rainbow, a' glowing with gold and silver on the bark of a fallen tree. Yet the bark-peelers will strip it aff and fling it aside without ever looking at it. Dear me! that so many tall trees o' the forest should be brought low to —— tan leather! And yet—I forgot ships maun be built—to say nothing o' houses. Agnes, my dear bairn, is not this wood, in its ain way, a very paradise?"

That word, which Aunt Isobel pronounced with a sort of half self-reproving smile, was not in this case altogether misapplied. For labour, the lot of man, seemed here, even in its severity, to partake of the character of a pastime. Here, from one party, the ringing axes, as they kept at regular intervals biting the knotted oaks, brought the short shrill echoes out of the grey cliffs that, ever and anon, showed some new shaped crag, formerly hidden by the umbrage. There a group of women, girls, and boys, and among them some mere infants, were beating the short limber branches, while a nursing mother, a little apart, wrapped in her red gypsy cloak, hushed her baby, and then returned cheerfully to her work. In one place, a number of strong men were hauling trunks or huge arms of trees out of the way, with merry cries, like those of sailors

at the weighing of anchor. In another place, lads were heaping up the poles together in pyramids, or binding the low cords of fire or spoke wood. "A rae, a rae," exclaimed many young voices; and away bounded the beautiful animal, with twenty shepherds' dogs barking in vain behind its flight. The squirrels, startled at the noise of the chase, ran higher up the branches of the standard oaks; and the large white owl, issuing from his crevice in the yew-tree, kept floating about in the darkness of the daylight, and then settled on a branch with his clerical countenance, to the infinite amusement of all the shouting imps in the wood.

"Come along—come along," said the impatient Lucy; "you see they have all left their work. Put your hand on my shoulder, Aunt Isobel; I see Mary Morrison is helping my mother down the brae." A dozen different little dinner-parties were now forming themselves in nooks and corners; while the linnets and the chaffinches in the underwood, or on the spared trees, whose nests had escaped the general devastation, began to take advantage of the silence, and were chirping and carolling in the shaded sunshine. The cushat, too, moaned from his pine; and two or three herons came flapping their slow and silent wings from some distant lake or stream to the elm grove that, for the sake of those noble birds, was suffered to stand with all its hereditary nests.

Lucy, with finest eye and ear, had selected the place for their forest feast. It was a close scene, yet in that covert was felt the whole spirit of the wood. Within the circle of an old charcoal-burning place, the ingenious creature had so placed several wreathed limbs of trees, intermingled with roots and tendrils, that they formed one continued couch, with resting-places for back and arm, and enclosed a slab sawn off an antique ash, which, supported by four pillars of unpeeled birch, formed a table at once elegant and commodious. That table was soon set out by Lucy and Mary Morrison; and as soon as the laughing glee had subsided, Michael blest the table, and after a moment's silence the feast began. "Why, Mary, had not you and I green clothes, and then we would have been very fairies? But Aunt Isobel is looking for a cup of nectar." And off flew the laughing Lucy, with her golden tresses dancing in her delight, and from that spring brought water clearer and brighter than any diamonds; while meek Mary Morrison moved round the circle with gentler steps, and with suitable demeanour, almost as if she had been indeed a servant.

Agnes, who had not been out of the lone pastoral country of Heriot Water for several years, felt her tranquil heart kindled by the beautiful forest scenery; and as she looked over the multitude of fallen trees through the stems of the standing wood, she remembered Dovenest, Hawthornden, Dryden, Lasswade, and Roslin. "O Michael! you surely will not fell yonder tree; look at it, and say if it be not the identical image of the oak that stands beside the ford across the Esk, at the very borders of Dovenest."—"Why, my Agnes, Dovenest, our house and our gardens, and our trees, all are gone, or, if not gone by this time, so much changed, that even you

would not know the place. They are building there a paper-mill; the mill-lead runs where were our gravel-walks; and the wheel goes dashing round where our father died and our Lucy was born." —"And why not?" said Aunt Isobel with a cheerful voice: "what were the walls but stone and lime; and the trees and shrubs, and even the flowers, what but dead matter, without thought and feeling? There is, at least, no change in our hearts, my son, but what, I hope, is a change for the better. For my own part, never was I so happy; I never saw you both so happy either at Dovenest or Sprinkeld as you are this blessed hour. There was no Lucy then. 'Come hither, my pearl.'" And while old Aunt Isobel kissed Lucy's forehead, they were all silent in the hush of happiness.

"Ha! ha!" cried Lucy, "yonder is auld blind Sandy Paisley with his fiddle. Only look, father, how his bonny wee dog Priney leads him through among the briars and branches; and how, with his staff feeling round in all directions, the auld man, without a single stumble, is making his way along the wood! See now; he kens folk are near at hand, for Priney is beginning to cock up his ears and bark; so Sandy has taken his seat on a stump, and now for his fiddle! Ay, you'll hear him singing too—hush—it is puir Tannahill's sang, wi' Mr Smith's music—'Jessie, the Flower o' Dunblane.'"

As soon as Sandy Paisley's voice and violin were heard, there was an end to all the dinner-parties in the wood, and the old blind musician was quickly surrounded by a crowded audience. Two or three young girls joined in the song; and Sandy Paisley then instantly changed his voice into a firm, deep, low, tremulous second, that charmed the most ignorant and uninitiated in the mysteries of music. "A reel, a reel!" was now the general cry; and half-a-dozen couple beat the sod to Tullochgorum, while Sandy yelled amain at every turn, and moved his bow hand till the fingers were almost invisible.

"Are these draps o' rain," quoth the blind man, "plashing on the grun' like lead? And callants and cutties, dinna ye find it close, and sultry, and breathless? Tell me, are there no ony black clouds in the lift? Hear till't—that growl comes frae the west. The thunder will be rattling like artillery ower our heads by the time I hae played three times baith parts o' 'The Flowers o' the Forest.'" Sighing sounds went wavering all over the wood; the western horizon, far and wide, was blackened; and all the workpeople flew to seek shelter from the thunderstorm.

Agnes had always been overcome by a thundery atmosphere, and had indeed, for an hour past, felt great oppression; but in such a happy scene she concealed her sickness, and had said nothing. Michael, after ordering the workpeople to keep away from the standing trees, carried Agnes, almost fainting, in his arms, and laid her on the heather-bed in the shieling where he had slept for the last two nights. Aunt Isobel sat down beside her; and Michael, taking Lucy and Mary under his protection, lay down with them under some leafy branches. The thundercloud was now right over their heads, and seemed to explode like a cannon.

Every person in the wood, for the space of a moment, was stunned; and there was all around, in the hotness of the unbreathing air, a strong smell of sulphur. Many started to their feet, happy to feel, by the use of their limbs, that they were unstricken, while a greater number lay concealed in fear among the bushes, from which now and then was lifted up the frighted face of some cowering urchin. "Where is Mr Forester?" cried twenty voices; and Lucy, who had been lying almost in his arms, leapt to her feet, and stood over her father, who was yet motionless, and seemingly insensible.

While the thunder went away, growling over the wood and the moor beyond into the eastern mountains, many hands were assisting Michael Forester. Mary Morrison was lying by his side; but in a few minutes she awoke as if from a dream, and looked about her unharmed. There were no outcries—no clamorous voices; all was nearly silent. Michael seemed to recover his recollection; and the first words he was heard to say were—"Lucy—Lucy, how is your mother?" Lucy heard the words with many sobs; but her sobs were changed into shrieks, for she looked wildly into her father's face, and saw that he was blind. The fire of heaven had scorched out his eyes, and Michael Forester was never more to see either the heavens or the earth.

Michael felt that there had been dealt to him a sudden and severe dispensation. But his soul knew not as yet what might be the extent of its great loss, for he knew not whether Agnes and Lucy were alive or dead. Isobel had left Agnes stunned into a swoon by the noise of the bolt; but by this time she had somewhat recovered, and came out into the open air. Michael now heard both her voice and Lucy's, and though it was the voice of weeping and lamentation, yet was he now content. "Puir man—puir man," said blind Sandy Paisley; "is it indeed a God's truth that Mr Forester has been blinded by the lightning? Puir man, I pity him." And he clasped his hands together in strong compassion, the very hands that held the string by which his dog led him from house to house.

In a little while one of the boys came from another part of the wood, and said, "Sarah Fleming is killed." "Puir orphan," said a voice; "Sarah hadna much in this world to wish living for—but she was a hard-working harmless thing, and quarrelled wi' naebody." Two of the woodcutters brought the body to the spot, where all the others were now assembled, and laid it on the ground. There was no disfigurement of face or figure, but the orphan girl was manifestly dead. She had neither brother nor sister, nor any relation working in the wood. Indeed, she had been an only child of parents who died before she knew their faces. And although, for a week or two, every one pitied Sarah Fleming, her death made small void in that little circle, and on the second Sabbath only a very few missed her face in the kirk.

The body of the orphan now lay unheeded, not from indifference to her fate, but from a sense of the unavailingness of pity, while every one was sorely disturbed about Michael Forester, and many tried to persuade themselves that there still might be hope, and that

his eyesight might be restored. But Isobel in her aged composure, Agnes in her exceeding love, and Lucy in the distraction of childish tenderness, all alike knew that hope there was none, and beseeched the workmen to carry Michael to Bracken Braes.

CHAPTER XII.

From the first moment there had been no hope for Michael Forester. This he had himself known—Agnes, Lucy, and Isobel, and all who had seen the nature of the affliction. It was a sudden and total change from light to darkness—from free bounding motion over all the varieties of the uneven earth, to anxious and timid steps along the floor of a sick-room, or at last to be guided by some living hand within a safe and narrow circle of unencumbered ground, set apart for the exercise of the blind. Such visitations come alike upon humility and pride, sweeping the low and the high places, so that the cottar and the king are equally insecure as the worm that is trodden upon among the grass. Oh! what thoughts weighed on Michael's mind as he felt himself carried in pain and darkness up and down the hills towards Bracken Braes! Thoughts of dependence and uselessness, perhaps of a life to be sustained on charity! what a change since the morning he had left them, as he heard the door of his house opened, and knew that he was to see that roof and that plane-tree no more! Utterly extinguished were those clear bright bold eyes that had never been afraid to look into any man's face—no more to gaze over the meadows and pastoral braes of his farm—no more to be turned in the delight of pious knowledge towards the glorious luminaries of heaven—to see sweet little fair-haired Lucy and her laughing eyes no more—nor her innocent hands folded in prayer before her Maker. Unseen by him was henceforth to be the meek beauty of his Agnes. But her soft low voice, that was still to be enjoyed far more than ever, and that blessed head was yet to lie nightly within his bosom. The dire distress met a sort of dim and awful contentment in the depth of his spirit as it descended there; and on the morning of the second Sabbath, as he heard and knew the sound of familiar feet and voices, somewhat, as it seemed, more cheerful and unconstrained, Michael Forester knew not whether he might not almost be called happy.

"I never heard the kirk bell so distinctly before. What a calm and clear-aired day must it be, Agnes! Has Lucy gone with Aunt Isobel to the kirk?" Lucy had that moment come into the room, and her father knew her lightest footstep—for even already, in one little week, had his thoughts and feelings begun to trust more than before to the intimations of the ear. He took his child's hand into his, and felt that her small fingers were enclosing her Bible. "Be

happy, my Lucy, in the house of God, for I am happy." Lucy's eyes were all filled with tears; but Aunt Isobel called to her, with a kind impatience, from the outer door, that the first bell had ceased; so the child gave her father a farewell kiss, and by the time they had crossed the wooden bridge the sun was shining so joyfully, the stream murmuring along with such a cheerful tune, and the lark so happy in heaven, that Lucy's cheeks were dry, and the bright calm of childhood established in her bosom, permanent as the blue region of air lying without a cloud from the morning till the evening of some long summer-day.

The house was filled with the stillness of Sabbath, and the other few inmates had left Agnes sitting by her blind husband. "O Michael! I am a poor weak being, and I fear that I have not been, in too many things, a good poor man's wife. When I look back on our eleven married years, I see myself cherished and cared for at all times like the best lady in the land. For me and Lucy has my husband toiled early and late, and in all weathers, while I was idle by the fireside. If Agnes Hay was in comfort, my Michael thought not of himself; and O may my Maker now graciously be pleased to enable me to do my duties—different as they must henceforth be—else better that I had never been born. O that this dispensation had fallen upon me! for I am but little worth in the house, and would have been well contented to be still and humble in the loss of sight, while you were busy as before at all your works. O my husband! if ever I have been self-willed or forgetful, I will weep in remorse of my sins; for you taught me everything I know, and without your communications of what I owed to God and my fellow-creatures, more worthless should I have been than even what I feel myself to be, with such a burden of love and duty now laid upon my heart."

The blind man would not interrupt that piteous voice, for it reconciled him to his fate. He sat up in his bed, and taking Agnes's hand into his—"This ring," he said, with a smile, "I put on thy hand with joy, when thou wert the fairest of the fair—nor have years yet impaired thy beauty. Blind I am, and must for ever be; but thy face will yet be visible, nor will thy smiles ever be as nothing in my memory. Never once, Agnes—never once—hear me, O Heavens! from whom came the scorching lightning—hast thou given me one moment's unhappiness! and if thou repinest not, I shall be as happy—it may be happier than ever. But I know you will not repine; for Agnes Hay, child, maiden, and mother, waking and asleep, by her own hearth, in the open air, and in the house of God, hath ever been a Christian."

Now for a while silent; and now speaking to each other a few affectionate words, three hours had passed away, and the congregation had left the kirk. "Agnes, think if my eyes had been yet unextinguished, and our Lucy dead, what then would have been the darkness and the silence of Bracken Braes? Both of us had then, indeed, been worse than blind; for what then to us had been the unavailing light? Methinks the dear lassie will soon be returning

from Divine service, or perhaps they have taken her and Aunt Isobel to the manse."

Lucy had come into the room with feet silent as the shadows, and had heard her father's words. Well she knew how dear she was to her father; but this expression of it, so overheard, carried her into heaven. She stood still at the foot of the bed—a guardian angel, unseen by him for whom she wept.

"Agnes, why are you sobbing?" said Michael; but his Lucy came up to his pillow, and, at once melted and overawed, knelt down and breathed a prayer, of which the few simple and broken words were assuredly not unheard in heaven.

In the cool of the evening Mr and Miss Kennedy came from the manse to Bracken Braes. Aunt Isobel had had warning of the visit, and had the house in the same cheerful order as if they had been invited to a festival.

"Come, Lucy, snod your hair a little, and dinna look as you had been crying." And at that kind command Lucy smiled from her very heart. The tea-table was got ready in Michael's room; and the presence of Mr and Miss Kennedy imposed a pleasant restraint on any too mournful feelings that might otherwise have arisen. The minister knew the character of his elder, and his words of comfort were but few; but they were chosen by a fine and pious mind; and the grace before and after that meal touched chords that long continued to sound in the resigned silence of the blind man's spirit.

Aunt Isobel, who had kept moving to and fro, now ushered in Sandy Paisley.

"I hope you'll no be offended, Mr Forester, wi' my coming to see how you are after your calamity. A blin' man like me can feel mair than others in sic a trial; but he can maybe likewise gie mair comfort."

Auld Sandy Paisley was kindly welcomed, and shook hands with Michael in his bed. He was privileged to speak, lowly as he was in character and condition—for he was upwards of seventy, and had been in darkness for forty years.

"Wad ye believe me, Mr Forester, when I say it, that it's just like a dream to me, the time when I saw the heaven and the earth, the stars and the flowers, human creatures and the animals o' the brute creation? My faith, gin I were to get the use o' my e'en now, how I wad glower at a' the outward works of God! Gude troth, I'se warrant I couldna comprehend them half as weel as I do now. It wad be a sair confusion."

There was a gladsome tinkle in the old contented creature's voice that made these few words a homily to all their hearts, and Lucy put the tea-cup into his hand with more than usual care and gentleness.

"I recollec that I was geyan gleg frae the first week o' my blindness. Before that, I never could walk twenty yards wi' my e'en shut, without being terrified o' running ower a precipice, or a coach and six, although I was in a hay-field. But nae sooner was I blin', than away I marched right leg foremost, without fear o' stumbling ower

a stane or a straw. I felt a little nervish and queer sometimes before I got a doggie and string; and ye wad hae leuch to split your sides to hae seen me louping as if I had been demented, high up in the air, and wi' a lang spang, at a bit runner o' water, aiblins the breadth o' my twa hands. I hadna learned then, ye understand, to calculate soun's; and when I knoited the ba' o' my foot against a stane, I wad caper as if I had run foul o' a haill cart-load o' road metal. But these are auld times; noo I gang daunderin alang as steady as a rock, or rather like a ship under sail in a fine breeze on the ocean."

The loquacity of some people—one can scarcely tell why—although endless, is not tiresome—and such now was the loquacity of this old blind mendicant. "We're gaun to hae a fine summer o't, I'm thinking. I ken by the sangs o' the birds in April what is to be the nature o' July. O but I like the lang days that gang snoving so cannily down the skies, for then I carena whar I sleep. I just drap down behint a stane or a dyke, wi' the kine lying round about me, and the wee bit moorland birds twittering, like perfect nightingales as they are, wi' sma' interruption through the star hours. Deevil the fear o' ony rheumatics, for I seldom want a drap o' the cretur in a bit leather bottle I keep in ane o' my pouches. Gude safe us!"—— "Nay, Sandy, my honest friend, a little more reverent in your language."—"Pardon, pardon, Mr Kennedy, and all the rest. I'm but a puir, senseless sinner"—letting his voice drop at the same time—"and what would become o' me, stane blin', and no sae far aff fourscore, 'gin my Maker should forget me wandering by mysel along the highroads, or among the hags o' peat-mosses on the lonesome moors."

Michael Forester felt his whole nature strengthened by Sandy's cheerful resignation. Shall I repine, he thought, or question the mercy of God's judgments, when I hear this childless, houseless, grey-haired beggar so happy, over whose dying hour there may be none to watch when it comes perhaps upon him in a snow-wreath, or a storm among the hills! "Did I ever tell you," continued Sandy, "the story o' the brig? Weel, then, you see there had been spate in the Yearn Water the day o' John Borland's wedding, and the broose was to be frae the Manse o' Mearns into Eaglesham. Thinks I to mysel, I should like to see the broose—that is, to hear the brassle; for I had a kind o' an interest in ane o' the pownies—Bob Howie's Pyet. So a while afore the start, aff I sets, intending to take my station on a bit knowe at the brig end. A kittle turn it was—half-way down a stey brae. As I was standing on a bit knowe, hearkening about me, there was something I didna weel understand in the soun' of the Yearn, a maist desperate gurgling, and growling, and rampanging o' water; and the roar seemed to gang clean up to the skies, without ony deadening effec o' stane and lime. O ho! thinks I, what's become o' the brig? I gangs cannily on, fit by fit, wi' Service before me (no the same doggie as that aneath my chair, but the father o' him); and Service, to be sure, youfs, and turns about, and rugs at the string, like a trout that has been weel heucked wi' a bait heuck.

The bonny brig o' Humbie had sunk down before the spate like a pack o' cards; and, heaven hae mercy! there comes the broose, along the flat afore the rising o' the hill, a' galloping like mad, wi' a score o' lads riding double, wi' bonny lassies ahint them. Puir blin' creatures, they were a' galloping to destruction. Up I gets, and awa like lightning, wi' Service barely able to keep up wi' me; for he was rather pechy, and had never seen his master fleeing in that gate afore —roaring out, 'The brig's down—the brig's soopit awa by the spate.' I heard Bob Howie on the Pyet—for weel I kent the cratur's feet like so many hailstanes—'The brig's fa'en down;' but on drove the wild deevil—for he feared naething in this world—while, thinks I, 'The Pyet 'll flee ower the Yearn, and ne'er ken the brig's missing.' However the broose fell lown, and the Pyet came back to where I was stanning, close to the hedge; for there was a power o' rough-shod cattle. 'Ye hae saved the lives o' mony o' us, Sandy,' said John Borland; 'what reward shall ye have?' Says I—'A kiss o' the bride.' And I pree'd her mou (I ask your pardon, ladies)—for I was a young chiel then—no exceeding saxty—and I had known Nancy Whitelaw since she was a bairn. Never played I wi' sic birr as at that wedding; and the company collected for me ayont thretty shillings, to sae naething o' claes. The truth maun be spoken—I wasna quite sober for half a week after. There's a gude deal o' meaning in that story, Mr Kennedy; but aiblins you have heard it before, though I never tell't twice the same way; and yet every way is the true ane."

In an hour all visitors were gone. Agnes and Lucy accompanied Mr and Miss Kennedy as far as the linn, and old Sandy Paisley retired thankfully to his straw bed in an outhouse—the sort of lodging which the blind mendicant had preferred to every other for many years.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was within his own heart and his own home that Michael Forester found the most effectual consolation under his irremediable calamity; but the universal compassion felt for him over the parish, and expressed in a hundred affecting ways, could not but breathe its own peculiar comfort. He knew that there was not a single fireside, for many miles round, at which he was not thought of, and prayers offered up for the welfare of his family. Not a day passed without children dropping in with inquiries from their parents; and offers were made and accepted, to perform, gratuitously, little pieces of work about the farm which could not be delayed, now that the power of the summer season was strong on the earth. In the discharge of his duties as an elder, Michael had been in every house in the parish. Families with whom he had scarcely any other acquaintance, now visited him with much of the affectionate solicitude of old friends;

while the few to whom he had long been attached by an intimate friendship, behaved like brothers, or sons, or fathers. If there were any persons who looked on the Foresters with unkindly feelings—of envy, or jealousy, or causeless offence—they now dismissed all such recollection from their minds, and bore testimony to Michael's worth and the piety of his resignation. Even Elspeth Riddel—the old lonely creature of ninety—who had not been able to attend the kirk for several years, tottered down to Bracken Braes, and on the utmost verge of life, with the world fast fading away from her dim eyes, and all its bands long ago broken, she eagerly beseeched Michael to tell her how his mind bore this dispensation, and smiled cheerfully when she heard his collected reply, like one still interested in this scene of shadows.

Michael had now almost completely recovered his former strength; and at first sight a stranger could not have discovered that he was blind. His deportment had always been quiet and grave, although he was a man of great strength and activity; and his blindness had occasioned but a slight alteration in his appearance and his movements. His high, broad, ample forehead, chiefly fixed the notice of those who regarded him; and in the pleasant calm of his other intelligent features, it was not at first observed that his eyes were extinguished. Michael Forester was generally the tallest man present; and his naturally straight and erect person was little if anything depressed now by the feeling of helplessness or insecurity. On the contrary, much was added to its dignity by that settled calm which, approaching to melancholy, was only found not to be so when you entered into conversation with him, and found his mind alert upon all topics, and full as ever of the power of intelligence and enjoyment. While ordinary—perhaps frivolous—mirth and amusement went on about him, Michael sat, unaware, perhaps, of the trifling pleasures stirring in the room; or, if aware of them, he allowed them to proceed without regret or approval. He remembered what he had himself been a couple of months ago, and was glad to think that those pleasant pastimes which sweeten life were going on in his presence, although he could now take little or no active part in such recreations. Voices now were to him the sole symbols of affection and happiness; and he felt himself every day recognising shades of tone in the voices of those he most loved, that expressed to him all the varieties of the most watchful feeling, and seemed even to yield him a deeper knowledge than he had ever possessed before both of their love and their character. A word from his Agnes was now even more than a smile had been before; and when he heard Lucy laughing or singing, in or out of doors, he also at the same time saw the happy creature as vividly in her beauty as if he had gazed upon her with a thousand eyes. Already he felt the gracious processes going on within him, by which nature supplies those losses which would seem fatal to the peace of a mortal being, and finally converts into a blessing that elevates the whole life, that which still continues to appear to others to be a curse that would almost make death itself welcome to the stricken spirit.

It was now the time of the sacrament in the parish of Holylee.

The kirk was a very small edifice, and with its narrow aisle, if the passage may so be called that divided the pews, was ill adapted for the celebration of that rite. Accordingly, it had been the usage, from time immemorial, to administer the sacrament in the open air. There was a low round hill, not far from the kirk, with a plat of level ground at its foot, of which, as it was a sheep-pasture, the herbage was always smooth and short. Round this green eminence the streamlet glided away like a dream; and, within the distance of a few hundred yards, an unseen waterfall refreshed the place with a perpetual murmur. The knoll was covered with the congregation, and on the edge of the plat stood a tent, from which the zealous minister addressed his flock. On that plat, too, the tables were spread—there the elders placed the bread and wine; and beneath the blue skies of heaven was ratified that mysterious covenant between fallen man and his Redeemer.

At this summer's sacrament all eyes were turned upon Michael Forester. For several years before, he had been seen there acting as an elder; but now he did not venture to take upon himself any active duties. Kind way was made for him and his family, as, walking between Agnes and Lucy, he entered among the seats placed on the greensward. Lucy had hold of her father's hand, and every eye blessed the little beautiful guide. The blind man was delighted in his darkness to hear the rustle of the leaves of Psalm-book and Bible, as the congregation prepared to sing the praises of their God, or looked out the text from which their pastor was to preach the tidings of salvation. He thought of other meetings of other years, yet his soul was not dismayed.

During this solemn service, the eyes of one young creature especially, Emma Cranstoun, were often fixed on the family of the Foresters. She was then, indeed, the Lady of the Hirst; for her father had died several years ago, and her only brother was a prisoner of war at Verdun. Emma Cranstoun had been educated fashionably in England, and this was the first summer she had been in Scotland since her infancy. Although one so well born could not want friends, yet Emma, in the midst of riches and splendour, had long been as much to be pitied as the poorest orphan. Her heart was by nature formed for every pure affection, but it had been locked up during those years when the fountain of feeling flows with most force and clearness. Delicate health brought her to the Hirst, to breathe for a summer the air of her native hills; and being on a visit for a few days at the manse, she now attended the sacrament at Holylee, and took her place among the humblest parishioners. Early during the service her eyes had fallen on Agnes and Lucy, whom she saw to be mother and daughter. Michael's calamity she had heard spoken of, and her heart was suddenly touched with emotions of pity and admiration. Although there was little difference in their dress from that of their lowly equals, Emma Cranstoun saw at once about them a finer character of feeling and intelligence. Her heart was interested, attracted, drawn towards the group by the cords of some invisible sympathy; and after the service was concluded, she told Miss Kennedy that she wished to speak to her tenant, Michael Forester. The impression

which, unaware to them, Michael and his family had made upon the young Lady of the Hirst, was rendered still more favourable during that short conversation; and Emma Cranstoun, who had scarcely ever before spoken to a cottager, because she had had no opportunities, was touched with a new delight on finding so much sense, grace, and beauty in those whom she had been taught to consider almost an inferior order of beings. Emma Cranstoun was but sixteen years old, and Lucy was eleven; so that her heart yearned towards the child at every blush that mantled round her downcast eyes; and she said within herself, that she would that very evening pay a visit to Bracken Braes.

Emma Cranstoun, the Lady of the Hirst, was accustomed to follow all her inclinations; but these were uniformly innocent. Self-willed she no doubt was, but her nature was a happy one, and even her caprices were virtuous. Her heart had been defrauded, by an imperfect education, out of much that was the natural dowry of youth, but it had received no taint of corruption. She had retained her simplicity in the midst of false or excessive refinement; nor had the hollow hypocrisies of those to whom the care of her early years had been committed, taught her any unconscious imitation of artifice or deceit. The creature of impulse she indeed was, but her impulses were all instinctively towards right actions and the society of the innocent like herself. Of this kind was her strong sudden emotion of love to Lucy Forester. It might be called a mere whim—a sport or sally of the humour—yet who could look on Lucy's face and say, that to love it at sight was either thoughtless or unreasonable? In the calm of the evening, therefore, Emma took with her a single domestic, and walked up the vale towards Bracken Braes.

With a delighted wonder at its perfect neatness, order, and beauty, the Lady of the Hirst stood below the plane-tree and gazed on the cottage. The enchantment of heavenly music rose from within with many a joyful swell, and many a pathetic close. She knew that the family were praising their Maker—that this was the evening psalm. She turned aside her head to listen more intently, and her eyes fell upon the golden light of the setting sun. The pure evening air—the walk up the vale—the whole solemn business of the day—and the novelty of all around her, worked upon her heart and her imagination; and when the hymn ceased, Emma felt the tears on her cheek, and drew a deep sigh of disturbed happiness. It seemed as if, since this Sabbath morning, a new life and a new world had been revealed to her, and that before this evening she had known little or nothing either of her own heart or of her fellow-creatures.

Lucy was leading her father out to his seat below the plane-tree, to enjoy an hour of its dim shadow, before they all retired to rest, when she beheld the Lady of the Hirst smiling upon her with the most affable benignity. "Father, father, our Lady is here," breathed Lucy in a whisper; and Michael turned respectfully towards the sweet voice of their visitor. Agnes and Aunt Isobel were soon of the party; and Emma sat on the osier seat beneath the tree, surrounded by her new friends, who regarded her with affectionate

admiration. Agnes Hay was fair in her matronly serenity, and beautiful Lucy indeed was, with all her kindling smiles, half subdued by bashfulness and humility; but Emma Cranstoun possessed that charm which only high refinement can give, and which is altogether irresistible and inimitable when united, as in her it was, with simplicity as unaffected as ever belonged to rural innocence in the most solitary dwelling. "They say that the Cranstouns have ever been a beautiful family," whispered Aunt Isobel to Agnes; "but never, surely, since they bore that name, was there a fairer daughter of that house than that lovely image." Then seeing a slight hectic flush on the lady's cheek, Agnes entreated her not to sit in the dews, but to honour a poor man's house with her presence.

The conversation led insensibly into the cares and joys, the pains and pleasures belonging to humble life. Emma Cranstoun asked a great many questions, but every sentence seemed to awaken her heart. Hitherto she had seen, and only seen, poor men's houses, and passed them by without a feeling or a thought. She had seen the smoke rising from the chimneys in the morning or evening calm, and thought it beautiful; but, as it dissolved in the air, it was forgotten, as if it had been a picture of an unreal thing. Now she looked with intense interest on all the furniture of the farmhouse; and homely as it was, in comparison with the splendour in which she had always lived, she could not but feel how interesting and appropriate it was, and how true the character of everything belonging to those excellent people was to their condition. "Are all the families of humble life like this?" thought the simple girl; "if so, may I live all my days at the Hirst, and be a daily visitor among the cottages."

The sun had gone down, and there was now as much darkness as there would be during the whole night. The Lady of the Hirst, more than courteously, wished good-night to Michael, Agnes, and Aunt Isobel; and happy indeed was Lucy to walk by her side part of the way to the manse. "Do you think, my pretty Lucy, that you could love me; for I wish that we were friends?" Lucy was afraid to speak; the very thought of such a superior being to herself calling her friend, was more than the simple child could for a moment imagine. But all the way back from the manse, beneath the moon and the stars, Lucy was thinking, in her delight, what she could do for that beautiful lady—how she could serve her in any way, however small, only to show her gratitude; and when she thought on that sweet smile, and still sweeter voice, addressed to her blind father, Lucy felt that she could die willingly for one so free from pride, so lovely, and so compassionate. Agnes, whose quiet heart was yet at all times filled with tenderest anxieties about Lucy, this night laid her head on her husband's bosom with an assurance that her child had found a friend; and that fair and benignant creature was before her in her dreams.

CHAPTER XIV.

LITTLE more than half of Michael Forester's lease of twenty-one years had expired when he had lost his sight; and during the first despair of that deprivation, he had thought of giving up his farm. But he soon felt that there was no necessity for doing so, and that with faithful assistance he could continue to pay his rent, and do justice to the beautiful property he had so long cultivated. That assistance he had found in William Laidlaw, a nephew of the old childless couple at Mooredge. All the braes had long been clear pasturage—the holms by the streamlet's side were rich in natural soil and generous treatment—each enclosed field had been brought to sustain unexhausted its due rotations of crop—the small coppice-woods, preserved from sheep and cattle, flourished amain with their oaks, birks, and hazels—while here and there among the hedge-rows stood an ash or an elm of no mean growth, and casting a grateful shadow in the pastoral solitude. Now that nearly three years had elapsed since his blindness, Michael had every reason to believe that Bracken Braes still preserved its superiority over every other farm in the parish.

During these three years it was astonishing what progress Michael Forester had made in that practical education which the blind pursue under the guidance of nature. Indeed, he had many and great advantages over the generality of men reduced to that condition. His strong natural talents and deep natural affections had all been genially cultured and cherished, so that, from the first week of his affliction, his mind and his heart had neither of them been left desolate. Thoughts and feelings had been stored up against that evil day, and the blind man felt strong in knowledge and in love. His habits had from boyhood been of a thoughtful cast; and when the presence of the visible world was veiled from his eyes, his meditations only became more concentrated—or rather more spiritual; but there had been no violent wrenching away or breaking off; and in an incredibly short time, memory supplied the place of sight, and her images were substantial as realities. His body and his limbs were powerful and active beyond those of most men; and he soon learnt to plant his feet on the ground without shrinking or timidity, and to walk along fearless of all obstructions. A hundred sounds unnoticed before were now familiar to him, each signifying something useful for the blind to know. He by degrees observed how all surrounding objects modified his perceptions. Measurements of relative distances were unconsciously made in his mind every shorter or longer walk he took, and paths became known to him alone, existing not to the eyes of others, but traced out by his ear and his touch. The stream could not wind its most noiseless way without his ear detecting the altered murmur over deep or shallow. He knew in a moment precisely where he stood, as the gentle din of the tiny waterfall rose up from among the hazels. The cawing of the rooks rising or falling on his ear, told him how far he

was from the Hirst woods; and he knew, from the plover's cry, before he came to the edge of the moss. Echoes, that others heard not, whispered to him the path in his solitude. The hollow ground—the acclivity—the bent—the lea—the light, gravelly soil—the heavy till—the moss turf—the heather patch—the wet rushy flat—the stony upland—here and there a huge rock—or an extended precipice—by help of these characters, he reperused in his darkness the country around him, that he had so long studied with open eyes; and thus every month he heard and felt his way farther and farther among the braes, hills, and mountains. He soon found that his long staff was indeed like a feeler, as old Sandy Paisley had told him, and that it was really every part of his existence. But it was not thus that all his practice had been acquired; for his gentle, patient, and devoted Agnes was for ever at his side; or Aunt Isobel, whose lamp burned with a more cheerful glow as the mist of years gathered round it—or Lucy led the way with a dance and a song, or hushed and silent as an undisturbed lapwing walking on the solitary lea. When alone, which he not unfrequently was, even at a distance from the house, he knew that the eye of God was upon every footstep of the blind, and, beyond all doubt, that very calamity itself brought wisdom. The creature was told by a still small voice to throw itself upon its Creator.

In such a state of mind, what a blessing was such a wife as Agnes! What, if a vain, light, unintelligent woman had been called upon to assist and comfort him, even although conjugal affection had subsisted in her bosom! But here was a guardian being constantly near him, night and day, strong in peace, innocence, and piety. No stormy passion had ever broken the calm continuity of her blameless life. Never had she denied God or her Saviour, by vain repining or wilful disobedience. Her Bible had not been taken up casually, giving unwelcome intimations that were neglected in worldly cares, or that served only to sadden the heart with the touch of feelings too solemn and sacred to hold long alliance with mere earthly affections. But in that Bible she had, from the dawn of reason, seen revealed a light that never was eclipsed by the clouds of this world. Let her read that book a thousand and a thousand times, not a single page ever became wearisome on the repetition! To what state of the soul might not one or other of those touching parables be applied! On evening of work-day, alike as on that of the Sabbath, had her heart ever been open to that Sermon on the Mount! So that when her blind husband was sitting by the fireside, that blazed with the old roots his own hands had collected, and Lucy working, or reading, or singing, beneath the quick notice of Aunt Isobel's eyes, while all the room was else silent, but the tick of the clock, or the rustling noise in his wicker cage of a thrush that had never known liberty; at such an hour, in that hut, restorative and like a voice from above was the memory of those words—"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!"

And during the three years of her father's blindness, how had

his Lucy shot up into a stately flower! On that disastrous day in the Hirst Wood she was but a child—now she was the fairest maiden of all the hills. Month after month had Michael felt her head growing up beneath his hand—and he had not now to stoop so low to kiss her cheek. Her voice had lost much of its infantine tone, and was deepened into a mellow music. Free still were her motions in the open air as those of the fawn at play; but she stepped about the house, of which she had now her own part in the arrangements, with a blithsome carefulness; while at church she sat as perfectly composed and attentive during the whole service as the oldest person. Her feelings were naturally quick, warm—almost impatient; and when left wholly to herself, Lucy might sometimes be wayward and headstrong; but when any duty called her to her father, then in a moment she was hushed, like a lark that drops down suddenly into its nest from the sky when the shadow of the hawk is seen on the hill-side. Nor did Michael Forester deny to his Lucy any of the harmless pastimes suitable to her age. Each season had its holidays; and perhaps winter, with all its snow, gloom, and darkness, was to Lucy the cheerfullest time of all the year. Then she and the Maynes went for a month or two to the dancing, in a barn near the Manse, or to learn church music in the village school. But above all the other festivals that came between their long intervals of homely life, tingeing them with the hues of imagination, was merry Halloween. In that secluded glen, the mirthful superstition of that night was felt to be prolonged almost from winter to winter. Bracken Braes was most frequently the chosen scene of the revels. The commodious kitchen was decked with branches of the hawthorn, red with its humble fruit—and with the holly boughs, cut without mercy, and in spite of all their prickles, to brighten the festivities. Then the easily excited spirit of childhood and youth threw all its feelings and all its fancy into the hazel-nuts that cracked away from the ruddy embers; and many a pretty face, in vain pursuit of the swimming apples, hung over the water-pail, with its long heavy tresses, to be readjusted by the hand of some boyish sweetheart. Meanwhile the older people carried on their own conversation by the chimney nook, undisturbed by the noisy mirth that gave a happier flow to their own thoughts; and many a joke went round the circle—the wit of the lowly mind that seldom lacks, in its contentment, a strong trace of kindliness, and wisely sports with the hardships of the poor man's life.

Nor had that visit of the young and beautiful Lady of the Hirst been the last, by at least a hundred, during those few years at Bracken Braes. Emma Cranstoun's heart had received on that Sabbath an impression which was never to be effaced. Not without great injustice could it have been said that the innocent girl had not before that day been a Christian; for in the midst of all the vanities with which her steps had been surrounded, she had never been a stranger to the place of worship, nor unacquainted with her Bible. But the influence that ought to have been prevalent and abiding, had been but partial and transitory; that book had been taken up only at

formal intervals of time far otherwise occupied; and the Sabbath-day, not more than decently observed, stood by itself uncommunicating with the week; so that a pious spirit had still to be rewakened and renewed. Neither had the life she had been constrained to lead frequently stirred her best human affections. But as soon as her eyes had been opened to the knowledge, however limited, of humble rural life, she beheld before her wants that she could supply; sorrows that she could assuage; evils that she could avert; and joys that she could increase tenfold; while, thenceforth, all the precepts of Christianity, either of will or deed, seemed to call upon her for obedience and practice. She had carried the beauty of her presence into every house in the parish; her charities, under the advice of Mr Kennedy and Michael Forester, had become every season more effective; and happy were all—rich, independent, and poor—to see that, on those errands of real religion, the lady whom all loved had drawn new health from the pure gales of heaven—that all symptoms of that fatal malady had left her cheek—and that Providence, under whom she humbly served, had bidden her own native hills breathe into her bosom a stronger spirit of life.

And where, during all those years, was poor forgotten Mary Morrison, Lucy's earliest friend? Had all their affectionate thoughts towards each other, as they had often sat in the same plaid, in the moors and mosses, passed away like the sounds and the shadows of that solitude? Had Lucy lost in her pride, now that she was a guest even at the Hirst, all her more than sisterly love for meek Mary Morrison in that lonely hut with her stern father? No; Lucy learned other lessons from Emma Cranstoun; and she who had been Mary's helpless friend in their infant days, had now become her benefactress. For she had ventured to speak to the Lady about Ewebank; and Abraham Morrison, with whom the world had gone hardly, had got such a reduction of his rent, and such remission of arrears, that he had not only kept his head fairly above water now, but, which was a great admission from him, acknowledged that he had reason to be contented. Lucy's love for Mary was the same as ever—there was no inequality in their condition—although Ewebank was indeed a far poorer place than Bracken Braes; and while Mary showed, by her whole behaviour, that she thought Lucy far her superior in all things besides her beauty, in which there was none indeed to compare with her in both parishes, yet Lucy, true to the bliss of former days, and without even the shadow of change, saw in Mary the very perfection of sense and sweetness, and with the same open and yearning heart as ever, as she came from visiting the Lady of the Hirst, turned away up the narrow birchen glen of Ewebank, and by the ingle or on the brae-side whispered away a few happy hours with Mary Morrison.

"O, Lucy, dear," said that humble creature, as one day they were sitting in their plaids on the hill, "do you know that I dream so often of my mother, that sometimes I think it must be her ghost that visits me in my sleep: she seems to weep—although not like one of us mortal creatures—and asks me if I am happy."—"How

very young you must have been, Mary, when your mother died! for I never saw her; but has she aye the same face in your dreams?"—"Ay, Lucy; aye the same white mournfu' face she wore when I used to sit upon her knee. I remember it just as weel as if she had been buried yesterday. My father was not at home the day she was taken away. Oh! dear Lucy, how my father looked and groaned for months—perhaps a year—after her death. Do you ken, I dinna think she was very happy: my father is unco severe sometimes, and if it werena for you, Lucy, I wad sometimes maist wish myself i' the mouls; but when I think that surely we twa will be freens a' our days, then I canna help singing by mysel, or being cheerfu' as the morning."—"Ay, sure enough, Mary, our love will never die; and long as we behave ourselves well the Lady of the Hirst will be our friend. But look, Mary, the sun is going fast fast down. Farewell, farewell."—"Oh! dinna be lang o' coming to see me again," said Mary, with tears in her eyes; "and, above a' things, dinna think that I lo'e not my father. O Lucy! when my father smiles, or even when his countenance is without a frown, my heart beats as if I could gang up and kiss him; and, after a', every ane has his ain way, and my father has his: there is nae reason to think he doesna like me, his only bairn; and when I was in the wanderings o' that fever, he was, I am tauld, sairly distracted." The two innocent young creatures parted on the hill-side—Lucy towards a cheerful home, filled with comfort, peace, and affection, where blessings awaited her from every voice and eye; Mary Morrison to a hut, perhaps silent and solitary, or overspread with the gloom of a parent's countenance, who knew not how to look kindly in his affection upon his only child.

CHAPTER XV.

Lucy Forester's fifteenth spring was now dawning upon her beauty; and although she had sometimes brought the tear to her mother's eye, and awoke Aunt Isobel's short-lived displeasure, by childish indiscretions and forgetfulness, yet, amidst all the allowable levities of girlhood that occasionally led her into little acts of disobedience, wilful or undesigned, one single instance of unkindness or neglect to her father had never been laid to her charge. Often and often had she refused making up parties of pleasure with her playmates, because he might expect her to take a stroll with him to a neighbour's house, or into the quiet pastures; and not unfrequently, when, on the very eve of some rural festival, she found that it was right she should remain at home, the loving child had done so, not only without murmuring, but with a proud delight. Her childhood was now over, or nearly so; and her father, knowing that she was approaching the verge of that season when all life would insensibly

appear to her eyes covered with a different colour, and when her affections would be liable to wounds from many causes that to her had as yet no existence, felt an anxiety for her sake taking hold of his very heart, and almost disturbing his sleep. "Our happiness," he would sometimes say to Agnes, "has been too perfect to endure much longer;" and he began now to be unhappy whenever Lucy was out of hearing.

At the Manse there had lived, for about a twelvemonth, a youth called Edward Ellis, the son of an English gentleman of fortune, who had been an intimate friend of Mr Kennedy. He was now nearly seventeen years of age, extremely handsome, and a universal favourite over the whole parish. Edward Ellis was a boy of fine talents, but his mind had not yet taken kindly to books; and although not at all deficient in the common scholarship of that early period of life, all that he knew had been learned almost intuitively, for his heart lay in those pursuits that brought him into immediate and free intercourse with his fellow-creatures. He rejoiced to accompany Mr Kennedy on his walks or visits, and thus he had become quite a familiar guest at the firesides of the cottagers, and at none more so than that of Bracken Braes. He was not, of course, without the romance of that season of life, and Lucy Forester was the queen of his fairy-land.

The love of Edward Ellis, however, was not such as to break his slumbers, destroy his appetite, or sicken him with his amusements. On the contrary, he slept as soundly as any cottar after a day's darg, ate heartily at all his meals, and few good days passed by in winter or spring that he was not on the hills with his gun, or on the banks of the river with his angle. His day's amusement, however, three times a-week, terminated, somehow or other, very luckily just at the gate of Bracken Braes. Most happy were they to receive the noble boy at all times; and Michael's spirits, it was observed, were always raised by his animated, open, and intelligent conversation. "If all rich people, all ladies and gentlemen," thought Lucy, "are like Emma Cranstoun and Edward Ellis, how happy must life be in the palaces of great cities!"

Lucy was not often from home when Edward Ellis called there; but when she chanced to be so, she felt something like a disappointment. She never went now on an errand down to the village—a dozen hamlets bearing the name of the parish—that she did not unconsciously entertain a hope that he might be angling within sight, or meet her somewhere in the neighbourhood. She had never thought much about her own beauty, till she overheard Edward Ellis praising it in warm admiration; and from that time Lucy Forester would stand a few minutes at her mirror, after she had arranged her simple dress, and perhaps return to it again to alter a ringlet over her forehead.

The quick eye of Aunt Isobel saw, but without any pain, the attachment of their sincere and uncorrupted hearts. It was a delightful dream, that would of itself pass away, and yet leave no wound behind. In another year Edward Ellis was to return to England,

and the image of Lucy would then seem to him like that of some shepherdess of whom he had read in a pastoral poem; while Lucy, happy in the humble enjoyments spread around her feet on the floor of her father's cottage, would let him depart for ever to the land of his nativity, nor send after him, when a month was gone, more than a tender wish for his perpetual welfare. Yet the thoughtful old lady, in praising Mr Edward Ellis, always took care to speak of his departure from the glen as not far distant, and probably for ever; at which times Lucy would give something almost like a sigh, and kept her eyes fixed pensively on the ground; but the indistinct dream soon deserted her imagination, and she would break out a-singing in her happiness.

There was a little waterfall of singular beauty, about half-a-mile from Bracken Braes, just half-way down the stream to the Manse. The green hills closed in suddenly upon some low rocks that lay quite across the stream, so that the waters, parting in two nearly equal divisions, poured over in separate cascades into the pool; while between them rose up a natural pillar, from whose base sprung a few weeping birch-trees and a single mountain-ash. About a rood of grass-plat was level with the sleeping waters below; and down into that solitary but always cheerful place, a sheep-track led along one side of the brae. An old decayed yew, covered entirely with ivy, and called the Howlet's Nest, stood within reach of the spray that kept its mantle in perpetual verdure. Here Lucy bleached the garments she brought from Bracken Braes, and here Edward Ellis was fonder of angling than in any other pool on all the water. Undesignedly, but fortunately, had it become a trysting-place to these youthful lovers.

There are often days before February has closed, that come down unexpectedly, and without warning, from heaven, with a delightful summer feeling that is not exceeded in softness even by the balmy June. On such a day Lucy and Edward found themselves together beside the Howlet's Nest.

"Will Lucy Forester give Edward Ellis a lock of her hair, to keep for the sake o' the bonniest lassie in a' Scotland, when he may be wandering afar off, perhaps in a foreign country, away beyond the seas?"

"Oh me! Mr Ellis," cried Lucy, with a beating heart; "are you indeed going away from Holylee, never more to return?" And tears, she wished not to reveal, in the sincerity of her innocent affection, trickled down her cheeks, from which the rose-leaf colour had in an instant vanished.

"No, no, my sweet Lucy, not for another year at least; and that is a long long time, is it not? with many months of long summer days, and many months of long winter nights, it is hard to say which the happiest."

Lucy felt relieved from a deadly feeling; for a year, to her young imagination, did in truth appear an almost unbounded time; and since Edward Ellis was not to leave Holylee for a whole year, she was again nearly happy as ever. Edward took one of her rich

auburn ringlets that hung over her temples, and while Lucy stood still in her joyful tears, he fastened a little gold brooch on her bosom, whose beauty, like that of the white lily, was alike fair in shade and sunshine.

"Now, Lucy, sing me one of Burns's songs; and, if you please, let it be—'To Mary in heaven.'"

The happy girl at once complied; and while Edward Ellis laid his hand upon her shoulder with all the tenderness of youth, she sung that beautiful hymn to the melancholy accompaniment of the lonesome waterfall.

Isaac Mayne, the scholar and poet of the vale, came down the footpath, and stood before the pair, just as Lucy was singing, for the last time, the pathetic line that commences and closes the hymn. Isaac was several years older than Lucy—about seventeen; but having been in Edinburgh for successive winters, and when at home buried in his studies, he had not been much at Bracken Braes since she had been a mere child. Isaac Mayne, however, under silent and shy habits, concealed strong passions; and while he seemed to be giving all his intellect and imagination to the study of books, he had yielded up his heart to violent human emotions. He had all along resolved within his own heart that Lucy Forester should some day be his wife; and the flower was growing, he thought, in its solitude, to the perfection of its nature, without any eye but his capable of discerning its consummate beauty. Some time during the last summer he had looked on Edward Ellis with a jealous eye; and now that he had left Edinburgh for a single holiday, he came upon him standing almost in an embrace with his own Lucy Forester. Pride—rage—shame—jealousy—and grief—all entered his heart together; and, mere boy as he was—indeed, what else were they all but children?—the same pangs rent his breast as ever drove manhood into insanity or death. His pale cheek became sallow—his dark eyes flashed fire—he thrust his hand fiercely through his raven locks, and his frame, that had been feeble from his infancy, shook as in a slight convulsion. He scarcely spoke, but passed by frowning and sullen, and disappeared down the narrow pass, as if on his way to the Manse. Lucy wondered a little at his abrupt manner, but said that poor Isaac Mayne was ruining his health and spirits by too deep study. Edward Ellis saw the truth, and, with the pride of a successful rival, laughed at the rude scholar, and said—"I hope Isaac will not drown himself for love."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Come, Lucy," said Aunt Isobel, "lay down your knitting, and give us a lilt, my lassie—any air you like; for your father seems drowsy, I think—your mother has not said a single word for at least ten minutes—yourself have been mute as an image ever since you took that net into your hand—and not a soul can I get to converse with me. This is dull dreary work; and that perpetual drive of blashing sleet against the panes is enough to deafen one's very life. Come, my bonnie bird, gie us something heartsome."

It was a genuine Scottish March night, wild as in winter. There had been a keen frost all day, and the wind had almost amounted to a hurricane. It had, with the fall of darkness, become more fitful; and there being a sort of thaw, a thin wet snow-shower had for hours been whirling about the glens. Only the week before, and there had been many gentle appearances of spring. The gooseberry bushes were green in all the gardens—the hawthorn hedges had begun to bud—here and there the early willows had put out a few yellow blossoms to the chance bee—the forenoon sun had wakened the insect world—and the angler had been seen walking down the stream. But now the waters were again sheeted with ice—both rivulet and tarn; and the pale aspect of the skies had foretold that the shepherds would soon have work to do up among the hills. The noise without doors had made all silent within; but Lucy, always ready to waken from her short reveries, dropt her netting at Aunt Isobel's request, and, laying her folded hands on her lap, and fixing her large soft hazel eyes on the floor, with her head and all its clustering ringlets tenderly inclined towards her father, who roused himself from his half slumber, and turned his face upon his child, smiling even as if he really saw her beauty brightening in the blaze of the kindled fire, she hummed a few low, sweet, uncertain notes, and then, richly and simply as the grey linnet, warbled one of her father's favourite ballads, the "Gaberlunzie Man"—

"The wind blaws cauld from Donought Head."

The small audience sat mute for a few moments at the close of the air, and Lucy had again taken up her work, when Michael said—"I hear a foot at the door—no Gaberlunzie man, I warrant; for nowadays they keep better under cover on wild nights, and the beggar takes his supper comfortably by the ingle in the small wayside public-house, if no cottar has taken him in. It will be one of the Raeshaw shepherds that have been down at the fords looking after the early lambs. Has he gone by without stepping in? No; that's a stranger's rap, and it sounds as from a feeble hand." Lucy sprang from her stool by her father's knees, but Aunt Isobel was before her. "Stand out o' the drift o' the door, ye delicate thing;" and then she opened the door but a little, for the blast came down the glen in a very tempest. "Pity me, who are you that faces such

a hurricance? Come in—come in;" and a figure in a tattered dress, covered with cranreuch and icicles, but in no haste to enter, came at last reluctantly forward on the floor; while Aunt Isobel shut the door against the snow that had been drifting into the middle of the room. He muttered a few indistinct words to Isobel's reiterated questions, who and what he was; and seemed as if he was not altogether in his right mind—although, perhaps, it was only the inclemency of the night that had benumbed his senses.

But Michael, the blind man, whose ear was finer than the mole's, rose from his chair and advanced towards the stranger. "What! are you an auld man, said ye?"—"Aulder in sin and iniquity than in years."—"It is my brother Abel—as God liveth and dealeth mercifully—it is my brother Abel." The staff fell from the frozen hand, and Abel was upon his brother's bosom. Agnes and Isobel gazed upon the wretched man, but for a while they recognised him not—that ghost-like being could not be the laughing and blithe Abel of Dovenest! But Michael feared not that it was his brother whom he held to his heart—for faint, broken, and feeble as that voice sounded, it was still the same voice that he had heard for so many years in that quiet garden. Lucy, who now and then had heard her uncle's name, but pronounced as the name of one assuredly in his grave, looked on the figure before her almost with fear, like one risen from the dead; but as she touched his withered hand, cold as the ice, love and pity arose within her for her father's brother. Never before had Lucy seen her father weep; and in his tears there was something so awful to her young heart, that she shed none herself, but stood, in perfect silence, a little aloof from that meeting.

They now saw, through his utter wretchedness, all that remained of the Abel of other happy days. Though he was cold to the touch, and quite frozen, yet he never shivered. His body was forgotten by him; and his mind—that mind once so quick and bright, so full of fancies for the young and feelings for the old, overflowing with resources for every season—it was now manifestly worn out, impaired, and shattered. He scarcely returned his brother's embrace: his eyes looked around bewildered and mistrustful; and he said—"Are not you Michael Forester, that lived once at Dovenest? If so, then hear me, Michael; for I am your brother Abel, who ruined you all by forgery; yet turn me not out of your door till the storm is over. Where is the old man, our father; for I see him not, and perhaps he is dead?"

A bed was soon made by the fireside, and the wanderer's head was on the pillow. Long had it been, no doubt, since the squalid beggar had lain on such a place of rest. Many years were at last over of houseless want that now had no record even in his own darkened memory. But there he now lay apparently in peace, with the snow-white sheets carefully folded round him, that had been woven from their own few flax ridges, and spun by old and young hands in the long merry winter-nights, when, alas! Abel was wandering far off and unknown! Fourteen years and more had passed since he had parted from them, in fear and danger, at Dovenest. And who,

thought Michael, can count the agonies, the diseases, and the despair of all the hours, days, weeks, and months, that crowd themselves into so many unbefriended and homeless years?

"O Michael! what means that look about your eyes? What is it that I heard about you at a house near the mouth of the glen?" "I lost my sight by lightning four years ago, brother; but I feel small loss of my eyes now—yet would that for a little while I could see my Abel's face once more." Remembrances of old times now seemed to be crowding in upon his mind, but every word he spoke showed how indistinct and confused they all were; while, of what he saw, or of anything connected with the present condition of the family, he asked not a single question, just as if his powerless understanding had submitted itself entirely to a dream. Much they wondered how he had found his way hither—where he had heard of them—and, above all, from what region had the wanderer come. Some instinct seemed to have led him, unawares, to Bracken Braes; for it was plain, from his wandering looks and unconnected words, that Abel knew not, for any continued length of time, in what quarter of the world he now was, nor whose fireside it was at which Providence had given him that bed of rest.

Perhaps there had been times when anger had entered into Michael's heart, thinking on all the ruin which his brother had brought upon him—times, too, when all anger had utterly ceased—when he had not only reconciled himself to the belief of Abel's death, but felt that it was better so, and that he did not even wish that he were in the land of the living. Then had come years almost of forgetfulness, and the blank of oblivion. Michael had never ceased, not, perhaps, even for a week, to think of Dovenest, and his father, and his brother. But that was the real living, innocent, and happy Abel; the brother of these latter years was nothing else but the image of a dim and disturbed dream. But now, from lands perhaps beyond the seas, and at the expiration of so many years of rueful banishment, had come the brother whom he had so tenderly loved, to all appearance a dying man. Well was it for Michael that he did not see his brother; for although yet a young man, his hair was quite grey, and all his features shrunk and fallen, like the face of old age. That voice told a mournful tale to the blind man's heart; but still he could not image before him such a sight as Agnes, Isobel, and Lucy now beheld lying on that bed. He thought of Abel, changed, wearied, and worn; but they saw the very ghost of Abel, swathed, as it might seem, in its winding-sheet.

Abel refused all sustenance, and lay, almost without speaking a word, quite motionless on the bed. But warmth and rest were sustenance to him, and sleep was coming to his aid. The psalm was sung in a lower key, not to disturb him; but he was yet awake; and the voice of Lucy, like that of an angel from heaven, was singing to his ear forgiveness and peace. Laden with guilt as was the wretched man, yet in our Father's house there are many mansions, all of them happier and more blessed than the most untroubled recesses of any earthly household.

CHAPTER XVII.

All anger, grief, hope, and despair, regarding his brother Abel, had long passed away from the heart of Michael Forester. And now, after fourteen years' absence, which had been looked on as the separation of the grave, the two brothers, who had always loved one another so well, slept with only a thin partition between their beds. Michael could hear his brother's disturbed breath during midnight. They sat again at the same board; but Abel's mirth and merriment had long been at an end; he scarcely ever opened his lips. Ingenious had he been with his cunning hands at all manner of work, out or in doors, making his very amusements contribute to his toil; and then, in hours of perfect leisure, no musical instrument had ever come wrong to him; he made them all discourse, and acquired skill was put to shame by native genius. But all these accomplishments, that had enlivened Dovenest for so many years, had long deserted their master; the very remembrance of them no more abided in his brain; all was weakened in his mind, or utterly decayed; and it was plain to every one, that if Abel survived, nothing could restore the powers of his memory and intellect. But let Providence spare him even thus, and an asylum was prepared for him in his brother's house at Bracken Braes.

During the whole of April, and on towards the middle of May, Abel lost and regained strength of body every twenty-four hours. "Had he come a year earlier to us," often said Michael, "we could have saved his life." Nature within him struggled to survive, for the heart and the mind of the unfortunate man felt the change that had come over him, and would fain have remained among so many images of peace and repose, after such weary and rueful wanderings. Sometimes, now decently and comfortably clothed, he wandered by himself into the fields, with eyes still watching him, and, sitting down on some sunny bank, remained for hours motionless, like a shepherd watching his flock. When in the warm afternoons the family took their meal beneath the plane-tree, there Abel was seated among the rest; and to a stranger's eye his face betokened nothing distressing, nothing but a placid melancholy, for the features were still remarkably handsome, and preserved an expression of intelligence which was no longer within the mind. More than once since May-day, on which there had been a small festival, he had been observed to weep; and Agnes thought that a good symptom, for the tears seemed to flow on account of something that was fast coming more distinctly into his memory. And true it was that Abel's mind gradually became less and less obscure. But as his faculties grew stronger, his bodily frame grew weaker and weaker; and finally he asked leave to remain in his bed, saying that he had heard a voice calling upon him from the other world, and that he wished to prepare himself for departure.

When it was seen that the bed on which Abel lay was soon to be a deathbed, there was not around it much outward demonstration of

grief. It even seemed best that it should be so, for he had run his race; and sorely wearied indeed was he, now that he had reached the goal. Little—nothing could be done by skill—everything he desired by affection. The neighbours knew his state, and came no farther than the door. Mr Kennedy alone crossed the threshold. Abel lingered in this way, suffering no sort of pain, but smitten motionless for several days, during which Michael never left his bedside. He gathered up each sentence—each word that the dying man articulated often at long intervals—and bound them together into affecting meanings. Both brothers were grateful to God for the wonderful restoration of Abel to his sound mind. It was impossible for any mortal man to be more truly penitent and contrite; and seeing around him nothing but countenances full of love and forgiveness, he could not but believe in the mercy of his Maker. All his knowledge of the Bible revived with his restored power of memory; and he was told that, great as had been his sins, he might hope for the salvation Heaven offered to all believers. He seemed to hold his eyes fixed for a long time on Lucy, and then life left his lips so quietly, that it was not till his brother lifted up his hand that they perceived Abel was among them no longer. The silence of the house was rather more hushed than before—that was all—and they who had loved him so well, dried up their tears. Abel had been in foreign countries, and driven about the wide world by land and sea. They buried him in a quiet nook of the kirkyard of Holylee; and before the next Sabbath there was a stone at his head, inscribed with his name and age. Rumours there had perhaps been among the firesides about the character of the dead man; but fifteen years bring oblivion even of great deeds and noble triumphs; and except his own family, there was not one at Abel Forester's funeral who knew what he had either done or suffered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

In about a week after the funeral, Michael received a letter from England, the contents of which he immediately communicated to the family. Abel had told him, a few days before his death, that he had joined his wife, Julia Mansell, at Ambleside, soon after he had left Dovenest; that she had died there in childbed; and that he, alarmed by the hue and cry that had pursued him even to that retired village, had fled to Liverpool, whence he had escaped as a soldier in a transport then sailing for the West Indies. This child, of whom he had never since heard, he left a few days old in the Poor-house. Michael Forester had written to Mr Colmson, the vicar of Ellesmere, whom Mr Kennedy slightly knew, inquiring if anything could be heard of such an infant; and he had now received an answer, that "Scotch Martha," as she had been always called, was living, and servant to a cottar in his parish.

Nothing was ever done hastily, or without due premeditation, at Bracken Braes. Some communication, however, there must be made, and that right speedily, with this orphan girl. As the servant of a small cottar in the north of England, no doubt "Scotch Martha" might very probably be, and continue to be, very happy; but it was Michael Forester's duty, and his strong desire too, to know exactly the condition and character of his new-found niece, and then to judge what ought to be done for her in future. What is there, thought Michael within himself, to prevent me from going to Ellesmere, and ascertaining precisely from Mr Colinson the vicar what is my line of duty on this occasion? The resolution was no sooner suggested than formed. "I will take Agnes with me," exultingly said the blind husband aloud, "and see if, in all the houses of Westmoreland, Lancashire, or Cumberland, be they the houses of cottar, tenant, statesman, vicar, or esquire, there be any maid, wife, or widow to be compared with my own Agnes Hay."

When this plan was first laid before Aunt Isobel, she declared most explicitly that both Michael Forester and Agnes Hay were mad, and that such would be the opinion of the whole parish if they were seen carrying it into effect. "You without your sight, my dear Michael, and my daughter there, delicate as a house lamb, to think of venturing by yourselves away into the woods, and lakes, and mountains, and wildernesses of a strange land! Order the lassie to come down here to Bracken Braes. Are not you her uncle, and has not the power of her dead father devolved into your hands? Order Scotch Martha down." But, ere long, Aunt Isobel began to see the matter in a somewhat different light, and to speak with less decision. "Why, my dear Aunt," said Michael, "would you grudge Agnes Hay one single marriage-jaunt in fifteen years? I took her with me on our marriage-day from Sprinkeld to Dovenest—not a quarter of a mile, as you know—and from Dovenest I brought her to Bracken Braes, not very unlike a soldier's wife on a baggage-waggon. Not above three or four times has my Agnes been as far as Lasswade to see her old friends there, for they have been good enough to visit me here—and you know how she has remained like a shadow by my side since that day in the Hirst Wood. Well, then, do you grudge her a jaunt to the land of the English lakes, which people say are so beautiful, and of which Agnes Hay has a soul to see the beauty—ay, to see it and feel it too, although she may use but few words, and these of a calm kind?"—"But, pity me, Michael, it's a long long journey, my son; and are you sure our Agnes is able to bear it? If you think so, and if you will both be happy travelling together into merry England, then, Michael, all I say is, go—go, and God be with you till you come back to Bracken Braes."

Preparations were busily set a-going for their departure. Lucy had at first longed to accompany her parents into England. To the imagination of one who had never been more than eight or ten miles from home, that long travel seemed like an adventure in a tale. Fain would she have flown away from Bracken Braes to that far-off country on the wings of youth and joy, to return again, ere long, like a

bird that, at evening, comes back from the cultivated valley to its moorland nest. But neither her father nor her mother had said a word about taking her with them; and besides, her heart told her that she must remain with Aunt Isobel. Reconciled, therefore, without one murmuring thought, to what could not well be called a disappointment, Lucy set herself, with all her heart and soul, to get everything ready for the journey. Her needle had no rest from morning to night. Up with the lark was Lucy, and never down till after the night-hawk. Aunt Isobel was busier than any bee; while Agnes herself, who, in her gentleness and composure, seemed idle to unobserving eyes, sometimes was acknowledged, at the close of day, to have put through her quiet hands fully as much work as both together. For Aunt Isobel's fingers were but feeble, cheerful as was the old lady's talk; and Lucy was off her seat a hundred times a-day, looking for that which was not lost, undoing or doing over again what was already done, and, in the confusion of her happiness, making progress by many little circuitous paths, followed because they seemed to be so much shorter, so that sometimes she could not help laughing at her own mistakes, and, throwing down her work, would trip out into the sunshine, and observe whether the skies looked settled for fine weather during the journey to England.

Michael Forester had held several consultations with William Laidlaw, Mr Kennedy, and Jacob Mayne, on all that was to be done about the farm during his absence. For even to Michael the prospect of being away perhaps a fortnight or three weeks was accompanied with some little anxiety. He had always considered himself absolutely necessary to all their ongoings about Bracken Braes. The very crops he almost feared would not grow after his departure; and he thought the sheep and lambs on the hill-side would miss the blind man who used to walk quietly amongst them with his staff. But all these important arrangements were made; all orders, oral or written, delivered and understood; and now, by sunrise, on a beautiful June morning, Mr Kennedy's taxed cart was at the door, drawn too by his strong sober steed, and driven by Alexander Ainslie, one of the sons of the soldier's widow—an urchin who had been about horses from the time he could crawl, and although only fifteen, nevertheless an expert and cautious Jehu.

Lucy and Aunt Isobel accompanied the travellers to the very end of their own valley. As they passed the Manse, there were Mr and Miss Kennedy to wish them, for the twentieth and last time, a happy parting and return; while the latter handed up to Agnes a basket full of choice viands, lest provisions should be scarce in the barren parts of England through which she understood they were to pass, and Edward Ellis, who was going to angle, as he said, at any rate, down the stream, leapt up into the vehicle beside Lucy; and away drove Alexander the Great in his pride, amidst many gazing villagers. At Broomyside toll there was a parting, with a few tears and many smiles; Michael, Agnes, and Alexander, to distant Ambleside, Aunt Isobel, Lucy, and Edward Ellis, to near Bracken Braes.

CHAPTER XIX.

Not a single adventure befell the humble travellers all the way from Bracken Braes to Ellesmere. The country through which they passed had not much beauty of any kind to boast of; yet Agnes, seated by the side of her husband, thought it often exceedingly beautiful, and described to him all she saw with affectionate animation. Michael Forester had more than once been in the north of England, and a few words from Agnes made him understand clearly where he was between stage and stage. He often turned his face towards the different scenes in the vividness of recollection, and seemed just as much as Agnes to enjoy the calm bright weather of June. There were several friends' houses by the way, where they received all due hospitality; and, after crossing the Border, the neat wayside inn, with its front white as snow, and sign hanging, perhaps, from the branch of an old elm-tree that stood in the circle before the porch, was cheerfully entered at the close of evening, and found to exhibit in its interior almost all the comfort, quietness, and regularity of a private dwelling. The equipage of our Scottish travellers was far from contemptible, to say nothing of their own appearance, which was such as to insure respect everywhere; while their driver became more dexterous and dignified as they advanced into England, and would fain, on various occasions, have entered into competition with gigs and post-chaises, which he could not see splashing by without a flourish of his whip, betokening a sense of conscious superiority were he to put Sampson on his mettle. The object of their journey was a right pleasant one, and they had left their home strong in its guarded innocence; so that there was something delightful to them both thus to be at a distance from it; and their spirits rose almost to the level of those more youthful emotions of happiness that they had experienced at Dovenest when not a cloud had passed over their wedded life, and when every sunrise had brought a new day of brighter or deeper enjoyment.

"Oh, beautiful indeed!" exclaimed Agnes, moved beyond her ordinary composure; "most beautiful!" when, from the hill of Orresthead, she beheld Windermere, and all her sylvan isles, lying, without one breath of air, beneath the sunlight and the blue-marble firmament! What a depth of peace in that resplendent water! What quiet pastures encircling the small retired bays! Never before had her eyes fallen on such verdure as crowned these hanging groves, and woods that seemed to cover the hills even to their very summits! The houses, too, how sweetly hidden in hollows, or revealed on eminences rising over the little valleys, with here and there an old noble tree flinging a wide shadow over the open ground that lay covered with sunshine; all, apparently, the dwellings of comfort and independence. Agnes then thought of Bracken Braes, and its solitary pastoral valley, where she knew almost every single bush, and every linn that murmured over its shelving rocks—the few houses, too, from Raeshaw down to the Manse. Holylee seemed to

be a reality—the scene before her a vision and a dream. But now a beautiful girl, about Lucy's age, passed by with a cheerful salutation, and the heart of Agnes leapt within her; for she knew that at this very hour Lucy and Isobel were sitting, according to their tryst, under the plane-tree.

Michael Forester had long been perfectly happy in his blindness, and no more wished that he could see, than any other person wished to discern objects beyond the horizon; while Agnes, knowing his complete resignation, seldom or never felt very unhappy now for his sake. But as they proceeded along the banks of Windermere, she could not help shedding a few tears for her husband. The beauty was of such a delightful kind, that as it entered into her spirit, she wept to know that it existed not for her Michael. Why should she gaze on that heavenly region in selfish and unpartaking delight? But her husband turned towards her with a smile and said—"Tell me when the lake is hidden by a wood, not unlike the Hirst, and with here and there a grove of larches, now, doubtless, grown into good trees since I saw them planted twenty years ago; for that is Calgarth, the abode of Watson, the defender of Christianity against the Infidel, and a name, therefore, venerated by the firesides over all our own Scotland. Humble people, like us, my Agnes, who pass by his gates, may well give a blessing on his venerable head, for he has secured to many a poor man his belief in his Bible, and that is bestowing charity on the human race." Agnes wiped away the idle and transient tear; for what mattered it that woods, rocks, and lakes were all veiled from her husband's eyes, since at all times his soul could commune with solemn or cheerful thoughts; and although deprived of the sight of men's earthly habitations, knew how to meditate on their immortal destinies!

As their journey was drawing near a close, Michael and Agnes began to feel a stronger interest in its object, and to converse earnestly about their orphan niece, to whom they were about to become parents. In that conversation even Windermere had entirely escaped the notice of Agnes, and on looking towards it once more, it was gone; and Alexander Ainslie had dismounted at the foot of a steep rocky hill, up which, he observed, it would be prudent for them all to walk. On descending the other side, they found themselves in a glen, and Agnes said to Michael that she suspected they were within half-a-mile of the Vicarage of Ellesmere.

The party from Scotland had been expected at the Vicarage the night before, and the vicar had now sauntered down the lane with his daughter Ruth, somewhat impatient for their arrival. He knew their character from Mr Kennedy; but now that he beheld them, he could not help being struck with a feeling even stronger than that of respect on their very first appearance. There was an humble dignity in the demeanour of the blind man, that almost impressed Mr Colinson with awe; while the beauty of his wife, which was no way impaired, only softened and shaded by years, and the perfectly ladylike gentleness of her manner, came upon him altogether by surprise, for of that he had heard nothing from the good minister of

Holylee. Greetings were interchanged; and in a few minutes Michael Forester and Agnes were introduced in due form to Mrs Colinson, and seated in the Vicarage. What was its external appearance—how many windows it had in front—whether it were thatched or slated—had it a porch or no porch—whether it were sheltered by trees, or gave its roof to the sunshine—Agnes had been too attentive to their kind host to observe; only she thought there were high hawthorn hedges, with hollies intermixed all the way from the gate to the house, and that she had seen, close at hand, an enormous tree, which, from its barkless and involuted trunk, must surely be a yew of many centuries.

The best preparation had been made for mutual regard between those who, in a very few hours, felt for one another what may well be called friendship. It is not easy to tell what qualities of conversation are most winning or impressive in early intercourse, or why they are so—a few sentences often giving us a higher opinion of the speaker's moral and intellectual powers, than any sentiment contained in them would seem altogether to justify; while frequently most excellent talk fails to make us esteem very highly the person exhibiting himself, and leaves us in the belief of his being, after all, but an ordinary, and in no way very delightful character. Long before sunset, all hearts within the Vicarage were touched with the kindest impressions, and Michael felt proud in the conviction that his Agnes was already loved and admired by the whole family. Of himself he did not think; but Mr Colinson, who was merely a sensible and good man, without any pretensions to scholarship or talents, was much affected by the blind man's superior character, and listened with more than respect to the plain eloquence of his speech, for it deserved no other name, and to the strength and soundness of all the thoughts that came from him, with that easy and natural flow peculiar to minds familiarised to early habits of reflection. The vicar had a son, too, just arrived from Cambridge, where he was a student of two years' standing; and the intelligent and well-informed youth perceived that, even in his own scholastic acquirements, he might not be greatly superior to this Scottish peasant. But this was not Michael's thought, for he lightly esteemed the little knowledge he had been able to acquire in youth, and to retain without loss in his blind years; and he doubted not that in a few days he would receive much instruction from the Cambridge scholar.

Just before twilight, "Scotch Martha," who had been sent for to a cottage about two miles distant, came to the Vicarage. Agnes saw in a moment that her features bore a certain resemblance to those of Abel. The greatest kindness was shown to the orphan, but there was no extravagant display of feeling; for Martha seemed cheerful and contented enough—was apparently in good health—and did not exhibit much emotion in her first interview with her relations. Her manner, however, was simple and pretty enough as she dropped Agnes a curtsy—a smile was in her eyes that shone with something of the same keen light that had belonged to her

father's—and although her dialect was not wholly intelligible at first, either to Michael or Agnes, yet there was a kindliness in the tone of her voice that was pleasant, and seemed to bespeak a character of cheerfulness, alacrity, and contentment. To the question, if she thought she would like to go to Scotland, Martha answered instantly, with little or no thought, that she would like it very well —for the young creature had no very strong or tender ties to bind her to her present place, and was plainly not only willing, but eager to go anywhere, however far off, with those who addressed her so affectionately, and whose very appearance assured her, inexperienced and ignorant as she was, that they were good people. Besides, had they not come from a distant country merely to see her—a poor orphan? And was not she about to have a father and a mother?

Never, during all their fifteen years of wedded life, had Michael Forester and his Agnes lain down to rest more perfectly happy than they did this night at the Vicarage of Ellesmere.

CHAPTER XX.

The vicar and his wife soon made their visitors acquainted with the history of their niece. Poor Scotch Martha had passed the first eight years of her life in the Poor-house of Ambleside; a miserable establishment indeed, where little attention was paid either to the bodily or mental wants of the paupers, and where idleness, vice, and disease were seen in their most squalid and loathsome union. The child had been removed from all this wretchedness into a cotton mill, where she was bound an apprentice; but the bankruptcy of the proprietor liberated her, along with many other pining pale-faced creatures, after two years' imprisonment; and Scotch Martha then became the sole servant to a very poor couple, carriers between Ambleside and Hawkshead. In that hard but healthy service she had now been four years, with very small wages, no doubt, and scanty fare; yet the pure airs of heaven had been constantly blowing about her; and the orphan, for whom few or none greatly cared, had, notwithstanding, been happy in the quick and strong spirit of youth, which is in itself happiness, and so tenacious of life, that it will not be stilled but in the very grave. To have been reduced to such a condition as that of poor Martha, would have broken the heart of many a child; but Martha had never known a better, and was reconciled to all its hardships and privations. She had been always accustomed to much indifference or neglect, for she was alone in the little world in which she lived; and while every one else had brothers, or sisters, or near relations, Martha had none; and also knew indistinctly, although without pain, that there was meanness or shame in her birth. Yet nature had not suffered her heart to be very sorely depressed. Some kind attentions she met with occa-

sionally, and these she treasured up in her memory with a keenness of gratitude proportioned to the rarity of their occurrence, often repaying the slightest civilities by the warmest affection, and looking on those as her friends who had only perhaps spoken kindly to the orphan on the road, or on the footpaths, as she was bringing fuel from the wood or moss. The old couple in whose service she lived were extremely poor, and wholly uneducated. Their sole endeavour of mind and body, in this world, was to subsist. They were by no means without religion; but it was a religion received passively—its usages observed decently from long custom, and even so observed not without a blessing—while their knowledge of the Bible, as neither of them could read, was imperfect and confused, and had been, previous to the time Martha came to live with them, acquired entirely from the church service. Martha herself had been at the free school for a month at a time, now and then, when she could be spared from her work; but her education had been small indeed, and, in that slavish condition, there was no time for reading any book. Yet on the Sundays, when dressed in coarse clean garments, and mingling with decent people at church, the hard-working and neglected orphan no doubt felt something of the sacred influence of Divine worship; and every month, as she was growing up to womanhood, had learned unconsciously more and more of her duty to her Maker. The misery and vice which her eyes had been made to witness during too long a childhood, were all utterly forgotten; and narrow as the sphere now was of her thoughts and feelings, Scotch Martha was at least a harmless creature, and, under such tendence as she was now about to receive, likely enough to turn out an amiable and intelligent young woman.

Michael Forester lost no time in settling matters with the cottar in whose service Martha lived; and it was agreed that, after their small harvest, which would be over in a week or so, and a few other trifling matters, she should accompany her relations to Scotland. So Martha continued, without any unnecessary visits of interruption, at her usual toils, the severest of which were now light in the foreknowledge of a speedy termination to her servitude. She was already quite a changed creature—bolder and more free in all her looks, smiles, and motions—the chains she now wore galled not at all, for in a few days they were to be thrown aside, and she herself to be taken as a daughter into her uncle's family. Yet long habit had attached her even to that severe and solitary life, and she now and then could almost have sighed to think that she and the old people were in a few days to part probably for ever. Cheerfulness and joy, however, were Martha's chief companions now—and she longed to be in Scotland, of which she had read in those songs and ballads that spread through adjacent countries a certain knowledge of each other's customs and character, and, true as they often are to nature, are felt and understood among all the varieties and differences of provincial life. It was soon known too that Scotch Martha was come of a respectable family; and all the neighbours round were pleased that so industrious and harmless a girl should have

been so providentially rescued from the uncertain evils of an orphan condition.

Martha had not many leisure hours during any season, and this was with her, perhaps, the busiest time of all the year. Yet, now that she and the old people were to part, she must leave them a few keepsakes, that the sight of the trifles might sometimes recall to their minds her who had shared their poverty. Out of her "sair won penny fee" she purchased a few articles of wearing apparel, and sat up an hour or two longer after her work to leave them fit for use at her departure. On looking back over the four years she had lived in their hut, nothing rose to her recollection but their small kindnesses, and her own most cheerful hours—their anger, or neglect, or severity were all forgotten. They were both too exceedingly old—not much less than fourscore—and, perhaps, their next servant would not be so attentive to them as she had been, and leave more hardships on their age. Martha knew that she was going to live with her own relations, and could want nothing; and, therefore, besides those keepsakes, she determined to give the old people back her last half-year's wages. As her necessities disappeared, the orphan felt her nature becoming every day more kindly; and she began to do what she had never done before, to look with the pleasure of hope into the years yet to come, and to feel that Providence, perhaps, intended her for a life of happiness.

CHAPTER XXI.

Michael and Agnes were now positively domesticated at the Vicarage. They had become perfectly acquainted with the ways of the family; and quiet, regular, industrious, and not inelegant ways they were, admirably adapted to preserve that competence which the inmates knew so well how to enjoy. Agnes described to her husband, when they were alone, all the beauties of the habitation; its slate roof, with so many irregularities, which were all seen, on the slightest attention, to have each a meaning, use, and character of its own; the tall round chimneys, surmounted with the blast breaking slate flags, and rising up almost fantastically through embowering trees; the porch, itself a parlour, with its niche seats, and outwardly overgrown with roses and jessamines; the hollies and laurels, glittering among the other shrubs, whose beauty lay more in their flowers than leaves; the smooth-shorn circular lawn in front, with its central dial-stone; that prodigious yew, under whose shadow the kine were milked; the stately elm grove, with its rookery—a pleasant elm; the tops of woods, seen in the distance, and the soft blue misty light, floating all between the meadows belonging to the Vicarage, and the rocky or verdant mountains that encircled the glen, and showed a different outline, under the changes of the atmosphere.

many hundred times between the morning and evening sun. Michael knew the scene, from his wife's description, almost as well as if he saw it, and, with a smile, said, he hoped Agnes would not forget Bracken Braes.

They were not allowed to forget any one thing they had left, for Lucy, although she had never written a letter in her life before, now sent them long despatches, full of news, about all that was stirring in the parish. These epistles, written in the true conversational style, when read to Michael, brought Lucy close to his side; and as they contained no secrets, they were given to the perusal of the whole family, one after the other; for Agnes was proud of her Lucy's accomplishments as a penwoman, nor had she any reason to be ashamed of the natural strain of sentiment that ran through them from beginning to end. "Our Lucy, Mrs Colinson, had the best education, I may say, from the time she could speak, for her father taught her everything himself, before it had pleased God to take away his sight; and ever since syne she has been constantly about his knees; so you may all ken what advantage our Lucy has had above any other girl of her age."

Only a fortnight or three weeks ago, and those now so affectionately disposed towards one another, and so happy in each other's society, had been mutually ignorant of the existence of the two families! Why need friendship, although a sacred plant, be of slow growth? No doubt its flowers are not all disclosed, but under the influence of tears, which are to it like the evening dews; and if tears were all that were wanting to the friendship of the Foresters and Colinsons, they were soon supplied; for Agnes had been unwell for a couple of days—having exposed herself, it was thought, too much to the midday sun, observing the merry work in the hay-field—and now lay in a low but oppressive fever, of which the symptoms became daily more alarming, till her medical attendant, Mr Ianson, at last pronounced her to be in imminent danger.

At the beginning of his wife's illness, Michael Forester had behaved with that calmness and composure accordant with his character. But no sooner had Mr Colinson intimated to him something of the truth, than it seemed as if he had spoken to a different man. That grave and resigned demeanour was in a moment changed into the wildest distraction. While his features grew rigid in his agony, he clasped his hands together, and, turning his sightless countenance towards heaven, he uttered a short prayer for mercy. The big tears rolled down his cheeks, and he groaned aloud without any restraint. It was not possible for any human heart but his own to know what his love was to his Agnes. It had pleased God to destroy his eyesight, but even the first troubled days of that affliction had been calmed by the piety of his wife. Love, affection, gratitude, and reverence towards her, had been accumulating in his heart for several dark years, till now Agnes was to him the being that kept in care its very pulses, and without whom it would cease to beat. Was Agnes indeed to die? "Dreadful are thy judgments, O Lord!" And the strong man fell down upon his face, deprived of sense and

speech. When he awoke to a sense of the condition of Agnes, that fit of passion was in no degree abated. Religion itself gave him no power over his misery, and he confessed to them all that his spirit was in rebellion against God, and could not submit to his terrible decrees. Where, now, was the merit of all his previous resignation? Joy and delight had been graciously interfused with all his former trials; and no wonder that he had borne them without much murmuring or impatience. But now it was to be tried, whether or not Michael Forester, with all his virtue and all his faith, was willing to acknowledge the supremacy of his Maker, or to lift up a brow of despair, which is only another word for helpless anger, towards the heavens, now black with mortal judgment! At that hour his soul was weighed in the balance, and found wanting; for he thought that he might now take the evil advice offered to the man of Uz—Curse God and die. Unhappy mortals! whose best affections lead to disobedience of the commands of Him who gave them for a blessing in this vale of tears! Happy mortals! who may come to know that even into the deepest wounds those affections can suffer, there is a Divine hand that can pour a balm that flows in the fountains of heaven!

CHAPTER XXII.

Cheerfulness and tranquillity had reigned in and about the house of Bracken Braes during the whole month of June. The spirit of Michael Forester had seemed to preside during his absence; and for the first week after the departure of her parents, not unfrequently had Lucy looked up when a shadow came to the door, half forgetful that her father was away, and expecting to see him enter and lay down his staff. Loud and merry was the murmur of the plane-tree, where the hill and the hive bees met in multitudes, regardless of each other among the honey dew; and Aunt Isobel and Lucy, according to agreement, sat below it at stated times every day, that Michael and Agnes, when far off, might think they beheld them in that pleasant shadow. Oftener, perhaps, than usual did Edward Ellis come now to the house, at least so thought Aunt Isobel; and indeed he could not otherwise see Lucy; for many were the injunctions her mother had given her never to leave the old lady long by herself, and the affectionate creature never cared to go out of the gate at the end of the avenue.

"You never go now to the linn, my dear Lucy; perhaps, for anything you know, the howlet's nest is gone. What would you say to find the old yew destroyed, and all its bright ivy? Do, sweet Lucy, take a walk down there to-morrow evening; you can easily make an errand to the Manse; nay, I will tell a white lie, and say to Aunt Isobel that Miss Kennedy wishes you to drink tea there. Mind now, my

beloved Lucy—do not make me unhappy—I will not leave the linn till the first star. But there comes that everlasting Aunt Isobel." Slight as was the fault of that stealthy assignation—which, indeed, Lucy had not, except by her silence, agreed to hold—she felt as if detected in doing something wrong when Aunt Isobel looked into her face, and no doubt saw its beauty overspread with many innocent blushes. Edward Ellis felt he had spoken a little disrespectfully of the good old lady, and set himself to make amends by his pleasantest courtesies. There was a charm in the graceful boy's manners, which were never lost on any one, young or old, below that roof; and when he rose to go, Aunt Isobel even pressed his stay. But Edward, giving one anxious and hopeful look to Lucy, took his fishing rod, and disappeared.

When to-morrow evening came, great was the struggle in Lucy's mind whether to go or not to go to the linn. She remembered the serious injunctions of both her parents, never to leave Aunt Isobel in the house by herself; but the white lie had been told; the long summer evening was wavering by, dewy and calm; that sun, which in another hour or so would be setting, was indeed a golden sun, and so were the clouds that lay over the golden sky; the stream, as it went gliding on towards the linn, seemed to murmur on her to accompany the music along its banks; and she thought of Edward Ellis, leaning perhaps, at that very moment, against the yew-tree, and almost angry at her non-arrival. "Surely there can be no great harm," thought Lucy, "in my just going to tell him not to wait any longer, and singing to him 'Auld Langsyne,' or the 'Flowers o' the Forest?" So Lucy put on her bonnet, feeling, notwithstanding her slight disobedience, that, while she loved Edward Ellis, her affection would only be for a month or a year, when he would be gone for ever; but that she belonged, indeed, to her father and her mother, and would live with them, contented and happy, all the days of her life.

She was standing at the door, looking at the sun, that now shone right over the Cairn Craig, when, to her surprise, there were Mr Kennedy and Edward Ellis coming up the avenue. They bade her good evening, with more serious looks than she had ever observed before; and her heart sank, she knew not why, in an indistinct foreboding of some evil. Mr Kennedy immediately began to speak to Aunt Isobel about their distant friends, and, opening a letter which he said he had just received from Mr Colinson, informed them that Agnes was far from being well; indeed, that she had a fever, and that her husband, not without reason, was unhappy for her sake. He then read the letter aloud; and Lucy could not but know that the life of her mother was in danger. She heard it with a pang of conscience, and, in spite of Mr Kennedy's calm voice and hopeful expression of countenance, wept in a fit of fear, pity, and grief. "Nay, nay, Lucy, do not weep so," said Edward Ellis, with a cheering tone; "the fevers in that country are sharp and severe, but not dangerous—not often fatal. Your mother is in God's hands; and do not fear, Lucy, but that she will recover." But every comfort was wasted upon the terrified child; and she looked in vain for encouragement to Aunt

Isobel, whose face had undergone a dark change. Mr Kennedy and Edward remained about an hour in the house; and Lucy, who accompanied them a little way down the vale, whispered to the latter, with a sob—"O Mr Ellis, Mr Ellis! can you meet me to-night, at twelve o'clock—ay, at midnight—at the linn?" and she retired weeping to the house.

Aunt Isobel did all that affection and pity could do to comfort Lucy, but all in vain: they were able, indeed, to say the evening prayer, but it was with sore distress; and they at last retired to their beds. "You had better sleep with me to-night, my dear bairn;" but Lucy said she would rather lie in her mother's bed, as she had done since they went away; and that Aunt Isobel need not come to her during the night, unless she called upon her; so by the dim summer light, each went to her own room. But no sooner was everything still in Aunt Isobel's room, than Lucy, who had never undressed herself, rose silently as a ghost, and, taking a few garments in her basket, stole out of the house.

Truer than any maiden to the trysting hour was Lucy at the linn; but there Edward Ellis was before her, and received the weeping girl with all the soothing fondness of a brother. "Oh! now, the time has come, Mr Ellis, when you can prove if you have any kindness for poor Lucy Forester. My mother is dying far away, and my blind father is at her deathbed. Ever good to us all have you been; and now I beseech you, in the name of the great merciful God, and the Son of God, that you will help me to get to the place where my parents are, far off although it be—mair, indeed, they say than a hundred miles." Edward stood in amazement and said nothing. "O sir! if your ain father were dying, you wouldna lang be here; and, puir ignorant creature as I am, you cannot love your parents better than do I mine; so, tell me—tell me how to get to England, and I will pray for you to Heaven, morning and night, as long as I am in life." And Lucy dropped upon her knees, and held up to him her clasped hands in an agony of supplication.

Edward Ellis tried to raise her gently from her kneeling posture; but Lucy seemed rooted to the ground. Then, lifting her eyes to heaven, she said, with a calmer and clearer voice—"O Thou that dwellest far above the moon and stars, take pity on me, and save my mother from death!" and, in the hush of the great heavens, it seemed as if the child heard a merciful response given to her prayer.

"There will be no darkness to-night, Lucy; for to-day was the longest day in all the year, and the morning will soon come upon the moon and stars. Cheer up, my sweetest one; and brother and sister as we are, we two will travel southwards together through the openings between the hills." Away they went, side by side, over bank and brae; and Edward Ellis, who, as a sportsman, knew all the hill country well, to the very English Border, determined to lead Lucy to the point where he knew, at a stated hour, a conveyance would be found for her to Penrith. No weariness affected her limbs; the passion of grief carried her lightly over the bags in the moss—over the stony torrents—and the steep heathery hills; no more tired

than a fawn feeding during the night hours; and, at sunrise, many a clouded mountain lay between her and Bracken Braes. She, poor fugitive, felt now that she had made her escape from Aunt Isobel, who never would have suffered her to go, and that she was indeed on the way to her dying mother. Even hope began to rise with the bright morning light; and as her feet brushed yet unfaltering over the dews, she faintly smiled in the face of her guide; and, in her gratitude to him, felt almost an assurance that her mother would yet recover.

They sat down together on the turf, beside a hill-side spring; and Lucy needed no other refreshment than a little of that purest water. But Edward left her for a few minutes, and, running to a hut on the edge of a birk coppice, came back with some barley bread. "You may rest yourself here, Lucy, for an hour or two, or even three if you choose, for we shall even then be in good time at the inn on the great north road; and I will not leave you till I see you in safe hands." Lucy put her trust in him, just as if he had been an angel whom she had seen come down from the sky. Her plaid had been brought with her; the noble hearted boy folded her up in it with gentle hands, and made her lie down by his side below the shadow of a gray mossy rock, that, like a canopy, covered a bed of smoothest herbage. Lucy, although she had not known it, was wearied with her flight of more than twenty long Scottish miles, and fell asleep with her hand laid in its innocence almost upon her benefactor's breast. Edward put aside the golden ringlets and kissed her forehead, and then he too fell into a slumber, but still conscious that his arm was over Lucy Forester.

In an hour or two Lucy awoke, and, starting to her feet, looked round as in a dream. But the thought of her mother made all plain at once: over moss and muir they again pursued their journey, and in good time reached the place where their walk was to terminate. Lucy received her instructions from Edward, who knew well—boy as he was—all the lake land; and she put his memorandum-book into her bosom. "I will get back to the Manse before night, Lucy, if I should have to hire a horse out of the work-field. What will the good people at Holylee and Bracken Braes be thinking has become of us?"—"I left a slip of paper in Aunt Isobel's Bible, telling what I intended to do, and begging her forgiveness; and there she would be sure to find it at six o'clock this morning."

No less magnificent a vehicle than his Majesty's mail now drove up in style; and while the horses were baiting, Edward Ellis looked in, and beheld two persons asleep, and two half awake. He opened the door, and, without ceremony, lifted Lucy up; but strong opposition was declared by the most pompous of the somnolent gentlemen, thus disturbed, in his ideal world, by the intrusion of a human face like that of Lucy Forester. An old-maidenish lady, with a somewhat sour expression, seemed disposed to join the leader of the opposition; but first looking at Edward Ellis and then at Lucy, her features relaxed into a benevolent smile, and she seemed willing to endeavour to make room for them both. A young man, in a naval

uniform, stopt the fat whig's mouth with a harmless nautical oath; and Edward Ellis committed Lucy to his care. "Ay—ay—young gentleman—I will see her safe to harbour, whether sister or sweetheart." Edward knew Lucy was safe, and had just time to shake hands with the tar, who bore bravery and kindness in his weather-beaten countenance, when the guard sounded his bugle, and off flew Lucy Forester of Bracken Braes, in a carriage drawn by four blood-horses.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Lucy had been committed to the charge of a man who would have gone through fire and water—nay, who had done so—nor thought anything of danger, to save the life of a human creature in jeopardy. Mr Marshall was a lieutenant in the navy, and his ship having come into Leith harbour for repair of damages sustained in a gale in the North Seas, he had taken the opportunity of wheeling off for a week to his father's house on the banks of Ullswater. He soon heard poor Lucy's story; and having learned the value of home feelings on the great deep, he felt the strongest compassion for his pretty little friend, and did all he could to assuage her affliction. Lucy felt as if the whole world were kind to her, and allowed herself to believe in the offered comfort. In a few hours she could even listen with interest to Mr Marshall's stories about the sea; and once or twice almost joined in the laughter of the other passengers, when the jolly tar became amusing in his anecdotes. Old maids do not in general stand high in public estimation on the score either of urbanity or tender-heartedness; but this may be a popular delusion; and certainly, in the present case, Lucy had good cause to love the sisterhood; for this elderly Preston spinstress was as tender towards her as if she herself had been the happy mother of many children; and on parting with her at Penrith, late in the evening, when Lucy was to leave the coach, gave her the present of an English Prayer-book, inscribed hastily with both their names—"Lætitia Bairstow, to Lucy Forester: God have her always in His holy keeping."

Lucy showed Mr Marshall the instructions she had received from Edward Ellis. "All right—all right—my bonny lassie; but you are not afraid, are you, to trust yourself with me?"—"No, sir; I will trust myself entirely to so good a man. You know where I am going, and from where I have come. Oh, sir! you ken that my heart is fu' o' grief, and that I want sair to see my mother—can you contrive to send me on to Ellesmere, and my father will be sure to pay the expense, for I am awa' without siller, and neither did Mr Ellis remember." The lieutenant put his hand kindly on her shoulder, and Lucy was silent. In a couple of hours Lucy Forester found herself in Seathwaite Hall—an old mansion on the banks of Ullswater—in a drawing-room, surrounded by young ladies, who, after

embracing joyfully their gallant brother, bestowed their wondering and admiring kindness upon his beautiful charge. It was late in the night; and except those three hours' slumber by the spring on the hill-side in Scotland, Lucy had had no sleep since the early morn of yesterday. She was conducted to the prettiest bed, in the prettiest room she had ever seen, by a young lady only a little older than herself, and who kissed her on saying good-night; and before Lieutenant Marshall had been able to satisfy the curiosity of his sisters about the beautiful Scottish maiden, Lucy was in a profound sleep.

Nature had given Lucy Forester into the arms of sleep, but all the while the child lay dreaming, there was a resolution kept mysteriously within her heart, that she would awake at sunrise; for her filial sorrow was not dead in that slumber, and it awoke her like a little knell at the time her heart had fixed. She opened the shutter, and looked timidly out upon a broad bright bay that glittered in the sunlight, shaded from the opposite shore by a grove of huge forest-trees. Lucy thought herself in another world. Several men were standing beside a boat—the first she had ever seen, except in pictures; and there was Lieutenant Marshall, whose loud cheerful laugh was heard from the water-side. As she stood considering how she could join the party, the pretty creature who had taken her to the bedroom last night came in, dressed almost as plainly as herself, and conducted her to the parlour. Breakfast over, Agatha Marshall accompanied her down to the lake-side, and leapt into the pinnace. Lucy followed in wonder; but she saw the lieutenant at the helm. The snow-white sail was hoisted and unfurled, and a breeze coming with a rustle down Glencoin, away went the Naiad of Ullswater, and, before a word was spoken, had rounded the green point of the bay, and was out of sight of her anchorage.

Agatha held Lucy by the hand; and as the Naiad stooped her gunwale in the wreathed foam that flowed like a waterfall away from her prow, told her, with a smile, not to be afraid. Friends of an hour—there they sat like sisters that had lived together from their birth. Lucy, oppressed as her heart was, and sorely troubled, could not help seeing, with the stealing delight of wonder, the wooded cliffs that seemed to shoot across the water and block up their way, and then slowly to recede, leaving nothing but the merry multitude of waves. Were these rocks, she thought, or were they old castles and churches hidden among the trees or the clouds? But Lucy would then close her eyes, for she felt them filling with tears, as she figured to herself the bed where her blind father might be standing to witness her mother die. "Let go the main-sheet!" cried the lieutenant; and after a moment's bustle they were all standing in a green meadow, beside a bank of willows. "You are now at Patterdale, Lucy; and here I and Agatha must bid you farewell. It is not often I see the old gentleman, and I must not be away at the breakfast-table the first morning I am at home." Lucy would not hear of a guide. Mr Marshall knew there was no fear of her missing the way over Kirkstone; the day was fine; so away danced the homeward-bound Naiad, with Agatha waving a signal from the

stern; and Lucy, after gazing a little while, turned her towards the great mountains.

Lucy had never been one moment utterly alone since she heard of her mother's illness. But now, in a short time, there was no human being near her in the solitude. House after house had disappeared, and now there was nothing but rocks and sky. These were not like the hills about Bracken Braes; and the child felt awed in the desert. She sat down on the ledge of a bridge, across a small rivulet that crossed that wild road, and opened the book given to her by that unknown lady. "God have her always in His holy keeping." She lifted her eyes from these words, and saw the lambs running races upon the scanty green plats among the rocks; the air was filled with murmuring insects; and a little bright bird, of a kind she had never seen before, kept playing his pretty gambols on the very ledge where she was sitting, as if for her amusement, and then began to trim his yellow and crimson plumage. Every creature seemed happy, and why might not she at least hope? She read over and over again all Edward Ellis's kind instructions, and hoped that God would bless him all the days of his life.

The young pilgrim was just about to rise and pursue her journey up the toilsome mountain, when two or three big drops of rain fell on the blue-slate coping of the bridge, and the dust of the road seemed in an instant sultrier. That narrow desert place was darkened between its fearful rocks; and she knew, from the sudden grimness of the heaven, that there was going to be a thunderstorm. Ever since that fatal day in the Hirst Wood, her heart had quaked at the most distant growl of the element.

A number of large stones, confusedly hanging over each other, afforded various places of shelter; and Lucy, to avoid the rain that now came down in torrents, and to lose sight of the flashes, crept into one of them, and endeavoured to hide herself from the thunder. There she lay with a quaking heart, while sometimes the thunder-crash seemed to shake the pillars of her prison. Looking out with a hurried glance during a cessation of the peals, she saw the tall figure of a man indistinctly moving through the mist; and the sight of a human being in that awful solitude brought her out from her concealment. Pale and speechless, and trembling with fear and the coldness of that wet dungeon, Lucy stood before him in the attitude of a suppliant. In a little while she told her story; and the old shepherd, who had been descending into Patterdale, turned back, and said he would see her safe into the vale of Ambleside. The hurricane still continued; but Lucy forgot all her fears, for the shepherd wore a calm and cheerful countenance, and told her that in an hour at farthest all would be peace and sunshine. He had heard, too, of the Scotch people at the Vicarage of Ellesmere, and assured Lucy that her mother must have been alive the night before, as he had been in a house in that vale, and had heard the family talking of her illness. At these words Lucy heard not the dying voice of the thunder, nor observed the water-courses that were traversing the road down that mountain-pass. She kept close to the

side of the old grave shepherd, whose words were few, but every one of which sounded sweeter than any music. "Noo, my li'le lass, that's Ammleside; ye canna gae wrang; so God be wi' you, and may ye find your puir mother in life."

Lucy was once more alone; but her guide had left her with a strengthened heart, and in a place where it was not possible to be very melancholy. For the short summer storm was over and gone, and the valley below her literally swam in light, as the sun, no longer obscured by the black clouds that were fading in every direction, illuminated the woods and meadows, and the winding waters of the Rothay. The blue roofs of the village, embowered in trees, sent a cheerful feeling into Lucy's heart as she passed by the gate of a building, which, with its dialled tower, she knew to be a church; and crowds of haymakers seen returning into every field after the rain, made her at once forget the solitary region where she had been overtaken in the storm. There was no danger of losing her way now; and, with almost a spirit of cheerfulness, Lucy dropped like a bird into the valley of Ambleside.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THERE had been a thunderstorm for several hours among the mountains of Coniston and Langdale, where the clouds lay heaviest and blackest; and now it had reached Ellesmere, and was raging above the Vicarage. The windows of the room in which Agnes lay in her fever had been left open, behind the half-closed shutters, that a wandering breath of air might haply come down from some one of the little glens, to relieve the oppressive sultriness of the atmosphere. As the thunder went rattling over the roof, and the flashes of lightning gleamed across the darkened room, Agnes was wholly insensible to the strife, and, although not asleep, returned no answer to the kind words of inquiry which now and then the watchers by her bedside ventured to whisper in their anxiety. In the intervals of silence, the many mountain-torrents were heard sounding on all sides; for there had been a deluge of rain at their sources, and every hill-side showed a number of cataracts. Michael Forester heard none of these sounds. His wife's hand was between both of his; and while at one time he seemed to be counting the pulses, at another he listened to her breathing, as if life or death were in each successive sigh. He was terrified lest those fitful pantings should all at once be mute, and for ever. So long as he heard that breath, to him all the outward tumult was as silence.

The vicar, and indeed the whole family, had nearly given up all hope of Mrs Forester's recovery. A fatal crisis seemed to be at hand; and as if each person read in the other's eyes an intimation that they ought all to leave the room, one by one they began to do so, and at

last none were left there with the dying person but Mr Ianson and her husband. The family collected themselves together in the large room below, and there they sat, not without sobbing and tears, fearing every moment to see Mr Ianson coming down stairs with a countenance telling that all was over. And thus they had sat nearly an hour—the storm was hushed—and sunshine was again struggling through the gloom, and finding its way through the lead latticed window to the floor of the room where they had been sitting so dark and silent. The swallows were beginning to twitter without, and nature slowly to reassume her customary cheerfulness and tranquillity. The door opened, and a stranger girl, stepping timidly across the floor, asked eagerly—"Is this Mr Colinson's, the vicar of Ellesmere? Oh, sir, I am the daughter of Michael Forester and Agnes Hay, and my name is Lucy. Is my mother in the land o' the living?"

Many kind tongues, and eyes, and hands, were soon comforting the dutiful daughter; but Lucy heard nothing but that her mother was not dead. "Oh! surely you are not deceiving me; and yet, why are you all weeping so? Where is my father—perhaps he too is gone—and God's judgments more terrible than I can bear? Here am I, a' the way frae Scotland, come to pray by my mother's bed-side; and God has brought me here unharmed, by means o' the kind hands o' my fellow-creatures, who all helped me on towards this house, so far away from Bracken Braes, where we live! O my bonny lassie! tell me—tell me—if my mother is indeed likely to live!" Ruth Colinson felt her own hopes strengthened by the passionate earnestness of this appeal, and said, with a faint smile, to Lucy, that her mother had not been any worse since the morning, and that, perhaps, the danger might be past. Just then Mr Ianson came down stairs, and there was no fatal expression in his countenance, so Ruth once more assured her that there was hope. Then Lucy sat down and cried bitterly, as if her heart would break.

At such a time there was no need of deception or concealment. None knew how God was dealing with her in the room above; but here was the creature dearest to her on this earth, brought to her bed-side as by a prayer. So they led Lucy to the sick-room; and in a moment, with every sob hushed, she was on her knees at her mother's bed-side, with her forehead resting upon the hands of her father.

The mind of Agnes had been wandering for some time; and the fever had caused many afflicting dreams. "Poor Lucy! drowned in that black marl-pit. Merciful God! see her—see her clinging to a branch! What can a blind father do to save his child? Oh, what shrieks! what shrieks!" Michael turned his sightless countenance towards Mr Ianson, as if he looked for comfort. In the agony of his despair, he believed that in medical knowledge lay a foresight of futurity, and he felt as if even the issues of life and of death were committed to his mortal hands. "O father, father! I your daughter Lucy am here. Put your hand upon my head, and know; my mother's face is not so changed as I thought; and she will live—will live—and go back with us, under the mercy of the Almighty, to Bracken

Braes." Michael Forester sat for a few moments mute and motionless; and then he too knelt down by the bed-side of Agnes, and laid his cheek on Lucy's head, the touch of whose hair, wet as it was with the rains, and sorely dishevelled, was familiar to the yearnings of his inmost heart, and calmed in some measure the severity of his protracted passion.

Agnes started up in one of those sudden fits of disordered strength, that in a fever often come upon the apparent prostration of all vital power, and opening her eyes for the first time during twenty-four hours, fixed them upon Lucy, who by this time had risen from her knees, and was standing by the bed-side. Perhaps the sound of that voice had been recognised in the seeming deafness of her spirit. Ever and anon she averted, and then again cast her eyes with a bewildered eagerness upon her daughter, till at last she stretched forth her arms, and with a face expressing the most passionate fondness, but nothing else, drew Lucy to her bosom, and, kissing her with a thousand kisses, fell back on her pillow. Lucy in that embrace had crept into the lowly bed; and there she lay by her mother's side, both mute, and, to all who looked upon them, beautiful as in the happiest sleep.

Now that Michael had been permitted to reflect on the wonderful appearance of Lucy at the Vicarage, and then had been told by Mr Colinson of the nature of her journey, he could not help feeling that the mother of such a child would be spared even for her sake. He had for several days and nights past thought of Lucy as an orphan. In his dreams he had seen her weeping in sore distress, and she would not be comforted. For in all his dreams Michael saw still the objects of his affection; and indeed there was no blindness in that imaginary world. Now God, and God only, had sent Lucy to restore her mother to life. "Impossible, impossible, that our child has been brought hither only to see her mother die! Hush—hush: they have both fallen asleep; and Agnes's breathing, methinks, is assuredly more free and more composed."—"I am not asleep, father, but my mother is; and O, I beseech you all, here let me lie till she awakes."

The fever in which her mother lay might be infectious; but Lucy never thought of that, nor perhaps did any one then present; for in such extremities prudence is not known to love, and all fear is for the dying. Without any clearly understood reason for it, every heart now began to hope. The vicar walked out into his orchard; Ruth looked after some little household duty with noiseless steps; and Mrs Colinson prepared some refreshment for Mr Ianson, who now appeared in the lower room, and said that there certainly seemed a decided change for the better in the condition of his patient. Michael Forester had followed him down stairs unperceived; and on hearing these words, not meant for his ear, but manifestly addressed to another, he felt as lifted up out of the grave.

CHAPTER XXV.

Had the load of misery under which Michael Forester groaned been all at once removed, it is probable that his mind would have given way, and reason itself been overthrown. He had often meditated upon all other evils that might befall himself or Lucy; but the death of Agnes had never been suffered to steady itself before his imagination as an event that might take place; and as soon as that horrid catastrophe was imminent, he abandoned himself, with headlong passion, to uttermost despair. But now he was told—and he believed it—that Agnes might recover—nay, was recovering; and his whole frame of mind and body was shaken as by a convulsion. He walked about the house, and then into the open air, praying and clasping his hands, and sometimes, when he thought himself unobserved, kneeling down and asking forgiveness of Heaven. All that night he continued to sit by her bed-side, as he had done for several nights before, although he was assured that the crisis of the fever was past. Lucy had been removed into another room—but she was in perfect health; and her father, contented with one single kiss of her closed eyes, seemed to forget that she was in the house, and sat like an image by his Agnes. Ruth Colinson, unknown to him, was in the room, for one or other of the family had been by that sick-bed all night long, ever since Agnes had been swimming for her life. Voices were still low, and sad, and whispering, and all the ordinary occupations of the house carried on in silence. Michael longed to hear one cheerful tone—any sound like a laugh—any motion that might denote bustle or activity; for he still gave a rueful interpretation to everything he discerned in his darkness, and shuddered lest the noiselessness of midnight might be a token of despair and death.

Another day and another night passed by, and Michael Forester knew that his Agnes was to be restored. Far was she from death now, according to the judgment of man, as on the afternoon she arrived at Ellesmere. Their usual gentle and steady light had returned to her eyes; the few words she was able, in her weakness, to utter, were composed and happy; she recognised every one with a smile; and two or three quiet tears trickled down her pale cheeks when Michael told her the story of Lucy's departure and journey from Bracken Braes. Michael and Agnes were now left much alone; and, kind and skilful as Mr Ianson had been, what blessedness to know that his presence was no longer needed in their house. When he did come, it was only a visit of congratulation; and Michael Forester was even able to enjoy his cheerful and jocular conversation; for Mr Ianson was something of a humorist, and had a store of anecdote, on which the club had drawn every Saturday night for several years, without any visible diminution of the charm of novelty. But in a few days the worthy Doctor discontinued even such visits as these; and Agnes, so far from being disturbed, enjoyed the life and animation that, somewhat restrained, were heard once more in every apartment of the Vicarage.

But the joy and gratitude of Lucy exhibited themselves in quite a different character. Hope and trust had entered into her young and innocent heart long before her father had dared to indulge them; and as soon as she was told by Mr Ianson that her mother was out of danger, a very flood of rapture overflowed her whole spirit. She tried to keep down her joy—she gazed on her mother's sunk cheeks, and wept—she went by herself into the room, or along with Ruth Colinson, and, kneeling down, poured forth the most beautiful extemporaneous thanksgivings—she opened the Bible, and read portions of our Saviour's history, His miracles and crucifixion—she put her arms round Ruth Colinson's neck and kissed her, for Ruth had comforted her day and night—and then going into the fields or orchard with that affectionate girl, she bounded along in her glee, or for an hour joined in the work of the haymakers, now housing the produce of the latest enclosure on the hill-side. If there were a flower on bank or in hedge-row, Lucy's eyes were sure to detect it; and she formed a small garland, whose sweet smell, she said, would restore her mother; for "methinks, Ruth, that your English flowers have a finer odour than even those at Bracken Braes; and I must confess that they are richer in their beautiful colours, for here there is mair shelter—ay, it is lowner far than at Holylee."

There had been one Sabbath only since Lucy's arrival at the Vicarage, and that was not a day on which it was possible for the afflicted girl to go to the chapel. But she now took Ruth's arm, who leaned on her brother Miles, and they proceeded to the place of worship. For a while Lucy heard the bell tinkling, but where she knew not; for still, at every turning of the path, as they ascended or descended, the sound seemed to come from a different spot. Then the head of the glen, which they had now reached, was quite filled with little wooded eminences, some almost entirely rock, and others partly pasturage—rent, obviously, by some natural convulsion from the sides of the mountains. Between these eminences lay patches of meadow-ground, watered by almost invisible runlets, proceeding from springs, or from the main stream that wound its increasing way down towards the Vicarage, and finally into Windermere. Here Lucy recognised woodmen's huts such as she had known in the Hirst Wood, but no other habitation. Well-dressed people, however, were issuing from all the coppices; and the bell sounding close at hand, she lifted her eyes in that direction, and there was the beautiful low-roofed chapel of Ellesmere, with its white tower and churchyard, encircled with the murmur of that mountain-torrent. As the bell ceased to tinkle, the cry of the kite was heard in the hollow heavens.

Lucy had never been in any public place of worship but the kirk of Holylee. All that she now saw and heard was in form very different, but in spirit the same. This small rural congregation had an organ whose music sounded sweetly and solemnly in that lonesome chapel. The psalm-tunes were not the same Lucy had been accustomed to; but her fine ear taught her at once to accompany Ruth, and with a low and somewhat hesitating voice she joined in those beautiful hymns. Before the worship was half over, Lucy gave to it

the whole religion of her heart. She thought of her mother rescued from death; of her father sitting at that hour by her bedside; of God's mercies to her, a helpless child; and of the kindness experienced from her fellow-Christians at the Vicarage; and with a fervent voice did the pious creature repeat every response throughout the service.

An annual festival was now at hand, called the "Rush-bearing," for which all the maidens in the parish about Lucy and Ruth's age, and indeed much younger, had been making preparations. The origin of this rite, evidently of a religious nature, is not distinctly known; but its celebration is with good reason supposed to be a thanksgiving for the hay harvest. It takes place in most districts of Westmoreland near the end of July, when the hay-fields are beginning to get green again with the after-grass, and a season almost of comparative inactivity intervenes between it and the first week of September, when the corn-fields are yellow for the sickle. Being a sacred institution, the Rush-bearing, beautiful sight as it is, partakes of a somewhat solemn character; and although no prayers are said, no hymns are sung, but all is silent, and the very meaning of the rite obscure, yet at its close nothing like amusement or recreation occurs, nothing to break the spirit of a ceremonial which piously regards the gratitude of the creature and the bounty of the Creator.

In the parish of Ellesmere the Rush-bearing had from time immemorial been observed with more than ordinary attention. The good vicar—which is not usual in other places—always took upon himself the arrangement of the procession. The children all met at the Vicarage, each provided with her flower-garland, dressed in white, and adorned with ribbons, whose colours, gay, and sometimes even garish, were, notwithstanding, pleasant to behold in that infant band. Nothing whatever was worn on the head, but every ringlet flowed free and unconfined. Ranked according to their height, the innocent creatures walked two by two, with the flower-garlands in their hands; and thus the procession moved, silent as a dream, towards the solitary chapel. Lucy and her cousin Martha walked side by side; and it was upon this day that they might be said to have begun to love one another with a sisterly affection. Every heart was happy, it knew not why, for every child that walked in that fair array felt the beauty of that whole of which itself made part; and one spirit of harmonious feeling pervaded the living chain, from the two leading maidens, now on the verge of womanhood, to the last two small creatures of five summers, who were often scarcely able to keep up with the slow pace of the procession. The birds kept flying from bough to bough, as the Rush-bearing passed through the coppice-woods; and in every quiet pasture the lambs frisked among their knolls. The chapel door was open, and in went the quiet sisterhood to deposit their flower-garlands on the pews, the pulpit, and the altar.

In a few minutes the interior of the chapel, which, with its dark oak furniture, stained walls, and low-raftered roof, was perhaps somewhat gloomy, glowed with a thousand bright and gorgeous

colours. Many of the garlands had been framed, with much taste, of garden flowers both rich and rare; but indeed it is not possible to join together a multitude of blossoms, and buds, and flowers, and leaves, without the aggregate being most beautiful. The Rush-bearers themselves—a name originating in another custom, now disused—could not help eyeing with delighted wonder the splendid show of their distributed garlands; and then, arranged as before, they reverently left the chapel, and hand-in-hand returned to the Vicarage.

There, beneath the solemn shadow of that ancient yew-tree, the vicar's wife had set out tables of simple viands—the same tables at which the merry haymakers had taken their meals. The vicar blessed the bread and fruit; and when the repast was over, some of the elder maidens sung a hymn. Ruth Colinson whispered to her father, that Lucy would sing one of the psalms used in the kirk at Holylee; and a leaf would have been heard to fall while she warbled

"Plaintive martyrs, worthy of the name."

The sun was setting in all his glory; and Agnes, who was now strong enough sometimes to leave her bed, had been for a short time sitting at the window, of which Michael ventured to open a few panes, just as Lucy began to sing by herself—

"The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green: He leadeth me
The quiet waters by."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THERE was now entire happiness within the Vicarage of Ellesmere; for all the shadows of death had disappeared, and Agnes, who had lain so long wasted and delirious in hopeless disease, had risen up in her pale returning beauty, and had walked about the shaded pastures, both in the morning and evening light. A deep religious gratitude gave a still more delightful character to those eyes, that never smiled without inspiring affection; and the awe left by the consciousness of the peril from which she had been providentially saved, breathed a mournful composure over a deportment that was at all times naturally sedate, making even the tones of her speech sweeter and more gentle. Her husband had not wholly recovered his usual undisturbed demeanour; yet everything he said or did expressed to Mr Colinson repentance for that passion of grief that had so utterly overwhelmed him, and showed that, on another trial, his heart would probably be more humble and obedient. But where was Lucy in her joy? Tell how the linnet in spring passes every

hour in its vale of sunshine. In the grey dawn, before the yellow sunlight tinged the diadem of the elm-grove, or melted the veil of diamonds that lay over the dewy sward, before the thrush had fed her brood, or the young swallows looked out from their nests below the antique cornice, while yet the kine were reposing, and the hare sitting fearless at a distance from his shelter, Lucy was out in the morning solitude, and forgetting her happiest dreams in the still and shaded loveliness that was gradually brightening over heaven and earth. Sometimes, even before Ruth Colinson was awake, had Lucy been by herself all the way to the chapel, and received kind words from the shepherds going to the mountains. The long day glided by, she knew not how, in various delights; and often did she wonder, on looking at the sky, to see that the sun was indeed setting among his golden clouds. And was Bracken Braes forgotten? The green broomy hills and treeless banks of Heriot Water—that one wooded linn, the Howlet's Nest, and he whom her heart had so often beat within her inmost bosom to meet there—Edward Ellis! No, no—all Lucy's affections were true to the place of her birth; and sad although she certainly would be when the day came—now near at hand—that they must take their departure from Ellesmere, yet her heart yearned at the forethought towards sweet Scotland, and there, among the banks and braes where she was born, might she also live, die, and be buried.

But this is the morning of the most beautiful festival that cheers the land of lakes, Windermere Regatta; and Miles Colinson, with Lucy and Ruth, will join in his pinnace that mediterranean fleet. As for Martha, she showed her good sense and her good feeling in preferring to accompany the old people, from whom she was about so soon to part; and Alexander Ainslie, who had become a prodigious favourite at the Vicarage, attended the nymphs of the household in his Scotch bonnet, which he wore with an air of pride, as if the object of universal observation. So bound to the Vicarage by love and by fear had been the heart of the affectionate Lucy ever since her arrival from Scotland, that she had never once left the vale of Ellesmere—the chapel, and the rocks around it, having been the boundary of her rambles. One glance of Windermere was all that she had taken on that troubled day when she was flying to her mother; and its beauty was like a dim dream to her imagination. But now the party winded joyously up the wooded hills, and below the precipices that intervened between secluded Ellesmere and the queen of the lakes; and Lucy promised not to turn her eyes from the scenery immediately around her, till Miles Colinson had conducted her to a natural watchtower at High Wray, built of rocks that no lever could have stirred, and with a flight of steps that had been hung in air by an earthquake. Miles Colinson then took his gentle hand from Lucy's forehead, while he and Ruth watched the expression of her countenance as Windermere burst upon her view—water, woods, air, and sky, all blended together in beautiful and magnificent repose.

The simple creature had never known any other world than that

of Holylee. That pastoral parish was to her the image of the whole earth. After reading to her father about other countries, all thought of them was laid aside with the book, and she saw and heard only the scenery of her native vale. But now Lucy felt herself in heaven —no dream, but a reality enduring in its delight. The bliss of novelty—beyond all doubt or comparison, of every bliss that the human soul can know, the most vivid, luminous, and dazzling—now possessed her whole being as she gazed and gazed; a capacity of happiness adequate to the beauty for the first time revealed, suddenly unfolded itself within her nature, and in the midst of her wildered and exulting happiness she wept to know that her mother had been saved from death, and that the Great Being who stretched out the heavens and the earth, had looked with an eye of mercy on her sick-bed, had hearkened to the prayers of her, a poor little child, and on His throne had guarded the footsteps of her blind father. "O Ruth, Ruth! this is by far the happiest day of all my life; and I will think of it, dream of it, every day and every night, as long as I live, when I am far far away in Scotland." But Ruth took her hand, without any reply, and bounding together down the mossy steps, scattering the wild-rose leaves, but without startling the redbreast from its nest; and then along the sloping hay-fields and old flowery leas, the two happy creatures stood breathless on a little pier that jutted into a bay, and there saluted Miles, whom they had absolutely outrun, with a laugh of raillery, as he handed them tripping into the boat, and then, with vigorous arm, made the Antelope of Ellesmere glide, with her broken shadow, under rock, and along level shore, till she reached the middle of the lake, and pointed her prow towards the place of rendezvous, Lowood Bay, with its few sentinel pine-trees and wooded mountain, with all its peaceful battlements.

Lucy remembered her voyage up Ullswater; but the wind had wafted the Naiad so swiftly along, that she scarcely knew where she was, till again standing on the shore. Grief and fear too had blinded and deafened her to the beauty of that morning. But now life and joy were one. The heaven smiled over her head; and as she looked down, there also were the heavens, whenever the oars rested, and the pinnace, with its gaudy flag yet unfolded, floated with almost imperceptible motion on the air-like water. But for the little bells that went wavering in myriads past the gunwale, and showed that they were on another element, Lucy could have thought herself sailing through the very skies, and a sort of pleasing fear subdued her gladness, when once more the Antelope resumed her flight, and brought them within hearing of the merry music, becoming every moment more clear and distinct from Lowood Bay. "Ay, there's the Bowness band!" exclaimed Ruth; "how sweet, Lucy, is the sound of the clarionet and bugle! and does not the hollow sound of the great drum fill the whole lake from Ecclerig-Crag to Water Head!"

Just behind a low pastoral point, that, running out from a coppice wood, formed one of the horns of a small bay, that to the careless eye was not observed to be a bay at all, but thought to be merely part of the straight shore, was anchored in shallow water, and within leap

of the silver-sanded beach, the Antelope of Ellesmere. From that station there was not only a view of Lowood Bay, distant a few hundred yards, but of the lake down to Belle Isle, and across to the undisturbed waters of Poolwyke, that seemed a lake of themselves, and almost separated in their still seclusion, from the spirit of festivity now breaking out all along the opposite shore. Like apparitions rising up from the depths of the lake—for whence they came Lucy knew not nor could conjecture—many a gaily painted pinnace now moved twinkling over the broad bosom of Windermere, and the echoes answered to shouts and laughter from the merry crews striving in amicable contest. Lucy started to her feet at the first signal-gun, which she thought close to their anchorage; and the little carronade having been placed on a spot commanding a multitudinous echo, it seemed as if on that cloudless sky peals of thunder were rolling round the whole circle of mountains, and, more than once reawakening when all thought them over, died faint and afar off, beyond the blue skies of Langdale Pikes—a mountain that, look where you will, still forms part of the scenery of Windermere.

Not one lazy straggler was now seen out upon the lake; but the whole tiny fleet was moored around the bay—a bright and gorgeous circle of flags and awnings. The rowing-boats now started for the prize, and all was animation and enthusiasm. But Lucy was told to look away from the race, towards Calgarth and Millar-ground—for the sea had sent its southern breezes, and the sail-boats, that had lain all morning becalmed in the bay of Bowness, now loomed on the horizon, and stooping beneath the winds that they were bringing along with them to the stillness of the airless water of Lowood, soon showed the various splendour of their array, and proudly imparted another character to the whole festival. "There goes the flying schooner, the Victory," said Miles Colinson, an enthusiastic and skilful fresh-water sailor, "and that is the Endeavour with its long white pendant, close upon her stern, standing on the same tack. They are going nearly before the wind now, and methinks the Endeavour is about to run foul of the boom of her mainsail; but we shall see before evening which eats the other out of the wind, when close-hauled, and in the wind's eye, weathering Seymour Crag. Look, Lucy, are they not beautiful?" Beautiful indeed they appeared to her eyes; but their beauty was as that of living creatures, and their motion as that of life, while, with wings white as snow, and meteors attending their course, they held their undeviating progress towards the mountains, and apparently without any guidance but that of their own spirit, went gliding by the hanging groves and woods. "'Auld Langsyne,' as I live!" exclaimed Lucy. And as the cloud of sail carried away that melancholy music, the Scottish maiden was for a moment at Bracken Braes, sitting beneath the plane-tree, and the Heriot Water murmuring along the willow haugh, down to the linn and the Manse of Holylee.

Apart from the bay and all its beautiful confusion, yet near enough to enter into the spirit of the festival, the crew of the Antelope remained with her during all the boat-races at their quiet anchorage.

But Miles Colinson now weighed anchor, and Lucy took her seat at the stern, while Ruth relieved the flag from its staff, proud of the emblazoning which their joint needlework had formed during the long evenings below the yew-tree. "We must take our place in the grand aquatic procession," said Miles, with a smile; "but I must take care not to run down the Nil Timeo, the ten-oared barge of the Windermere Sailing Club." Much brandishing and splashing of oars there was, before both lines were formed, and the "grand aquatic procession" moved in the sunshine over the dark-blue waters, as if some doughty Doge were about to wed the Lady of the Lake. The crew of each boat, doubtless, thought her the brightest star in that moving constellation; and so occupied were all the rowers and their companies with their nice and difficult duties, that it was only now and then that the sail-boats attracted notice, when bearing down, with a freshened breeze, upon the procession returning to its anchorage in the form of a crescent. They tacked suddenly, just when about to break the line, and bore away majestically before the wind, with their bands playing "Rule Britannia," or "God Save the King."

"Ruth, Ruth," exclaimed Lucy, "there is bonny Agatha Marshall, who was so kind to me at her father's house on the banks of that other lake;" and the two boats were now so close together that Lucy and Agatha shook hands across their gunwales, and then again in a moment were separated by an oar-length of foamy water. By this time Lucy had become quite a bold sailor; and, taking off her bonnet, that she might behold the spectacle on all sides, down fell her clustering ringlets in a shower of sunbeams over her cheeks and neck; and never had the Cambridge scholar beheld in imagination so bright a figure of an Hour, a Grace, or a Nereid, as that fair Scottish shepherdess, now gazing on him with smiles of bewildered happiness. Like an hour, too, she was to pass away; and, although unforgotten, yet to return never, never more. But the horns of the crescent had touched Lowood Bay—a hundred oars rose into the air—the boats were again anchored or drawn up to the beach—the whole fleet deserted by their crews—and the shores alive, from the water edge to the knolls below the wooded Scaur where the hawks inhabit.

Lucy sought anxiously through the moving crowd for Agatha Marshall, and it was not long before they recognised each other. The Colinsons and Marshalls were not altogether strangers, and the two parties agreed to retire from the stir and bustle of the scene, and have a repast in some quiet glade within reach of the lake breezes. Miles soon recollected a fit spot, halfway between Lowood and Ecclerig; and a crowd of remembrances came over Lucy's mind, when in a few minutes they sat down upon the bank of a charcoal pit, within a wood that had been thinned that very spring—so perfectly like the Hirst Wood, where her father lost his sight in that thunderstorm. Agatha, Lucy, and Ruth, were all intimate friends in a few minutes; and Lucy's eyes beamed with joy to hear that the lieutenant had been most prosperous in his late cruise, and was now quite a rich man. "They say we are to have peace soon, and then

my brother will live with us at Seathwaite Hall, and we shall get regattas of our own on Ullswater; Lucy Forester will surely visit her friends again—and I do not despair of seeing her with us long before—I am married."

Mirth and merriment soon grew general, but never loud, over that sylvan saloon. In an hour or two, the heron, that had been disturbed by unusual clamour, was seen returning from Rydal Woods, with wings moving not quicker than oars, and his flight gradually descending nearer and nearer the water, as he kept approaching his nest on Rough-holm, by the deserted bay of Ray-rigg. The wind, too, was dying away, as the sun declined westward; and here and there a boat, with elderly people and children taking an early farewell of the revelries, crawled almost reluctantly homewards along the sleeping lake, that was spread with deepening shadows. Independently of the umbrage of the forest boughs, the air was cooler, although calmer; and the butterflies, that had enjoyed that day of light, had all settled down upon the wildflowers. "Part we must not without some Scottish music," was the feeling of all the party; and Lucy, who never in all her life had been asked twice to do anything she could do, warbled the wildest and most mournful spirit of the genius of her country. There were wet eyes during some of those airs; for worthy indeed were they of tears, sung as they now were by one to whom nature had taught the music of the heart, in whose sorrow innocence rejoices amidst the pauses of its gladness, and then returns more happy to its own living world. It seemed, as she sung, that the composure of the soul within her almost sobered the golden gleam above her forehead, and touched with paleness the roses of her cheek. Fair moved the bosom of one not yet woman grown, while those liquid murmurs left her lips apart in their beauty; and when, at the close of the tune, every tongue and eye applauded, Lucy soon recovered all her gladsome smiles, and lifted up from the sward eyes that looked as if they could express no other emotion than that of rejoicing happiness.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The stay of the Foresters at the Vicarage of Ellesmere had been protracted some time beyond the almost perfect recovery of Agnes, by mutual friendship of a very deep and endearing character. Distress and sympathy had opened up and exhibited the recesses of each other's hearts, and that two months' visit had made revelation of feelings which might have lain concealed during a whole life. But the day of parting had come at last. The vicar, his wife, and his son and daughters, had accompanied their beloved guests as far as Seathwaite Hall, on Ullswater, and the final farewell had thus been less melancholy than if it had taken place at the door of their

own dwelling. Michael parted from a friend in Mr Colinson whom he held dearer than he supposed he could have done any new acquaintance at his time of life, when the heart is contented with affections of old standing, and is slow to expand itself fully under the power of any fresh attachment. The admirable character of the vicar—one of the most modest, humble, and unassuming of men—had betrayed itself unconsciously, in many simple traits, almost every day after their friendship was a week old; and Michael—who at first scarcely understood how to reconcile Mr Colinson's zeal in secular concerns with such a religious spirit as his sacred profession demanded, and wondered a little at his manual labours in the hay-field and the barn—ere long discerned that the reconcilement of custom can, without moral injury, blend together pursuits elsewhere deemed repugnant, and acknowledged that the life of a good man ought not to be tried by any other test than the consistency of its own condition. In Scotland, Michael Forester was aware that no clergyman could engage personally in rural toils, almost like a hind, without loss of character and implied degradation of mind; but in Ellesmere the spirit of the clerical life had for ages been of this homely and primitive kind. Even in dress, the vicar, he was told by Agnes, was but little distinguished from the respectable householders around; and clad as he was, throughout the week, in grey, she confessed that she had never completely felt that he was a clergyman till the first Sabbath, when, walking to the chapel, he appeared just like Mr Kennedy at Holylee—more dignified and impressive, it might be, from the contrast of his usual homeliness of dress and manner; but, in good truth, each member of the family at the Vicarage was alike estimable. Although far inferior both in mental and corporeal gifts to Agnes, yet Mrs Colinson was a woman without guile, and of a truly Christian spirit. She had borne many afflictions that had never fallen to the lot of Agnes, with unrepining resignation. No human being ever worshipped her Maker more in spirit and in truth than did she every Sabbath in that little chapel. Her charities were like the night-dews—felt, not seen; and one good deed was by her forgotten in another; her whole life being passed in a quiet succession of kindnesses towards her fellow-creatures. Ruth, her sole surviving daughter, was also the flower of all the flock, and allowed to be the sweetest and the prettiest girl in Ellesmere; and Miles, who had already distinguished himself at Cambridge both in classical literature and science, reminded the elder statesmen in the neighbouring vales of his uncle, Joshua Colinson, formerly curate of Wansfell, whose fame as a mathematician and divine still survived in those obscure and remote places, whither he had retired in the prime of life, and where he had died, in ignoble but useful retirement, in a green old age. But the Foresters were far away from the Vicarage now; and had returned, all safe and well, to Bracken Braes.

If tears had blinded Lucy's eyes as they stole a last glance of Ellesmere, it is not to be thought that they were dry when once more she beheld the spire of Holylee kirk. As they passed the Manse,

her heart beat wildly; for there was Edward Ellis, with a kindly smile, and a look of rejoicing salutation. Aunt Isobel was on the look-out for them below the plane-tree; and after the first weeping embrace was over, and all had time to feel that the roof of Bracken Braes was indeed over them once more, Michael gave thanks to the Almighty for bringing them all out of their late tribulation. Little or no change was visible in the rooms; as far as their faithful memory served, everything was in its usual place—untouched, yet free from dust. The old clock, that had rest while Aunt Isobel sojourned in the Manse, now ticked with all its power; a few books lay on the broad wooden chimneypiece, and Lucy remembered the very passage she had been reading that day the letter came from Mr Colinson about her mother's illness; the barking glee of the two shepherd dogs was over, and the creatures sat each at its own side of the fire, glad of the return; and there was the speckle-breasted mavis, in his cheerful prison, aware that it was Lucy's white hand that now ran its fingers along the wicker-bars. The seasons at Bracken Braes were not so early as at Ellesmere. It was not above a week ago since the first swathe of grass had fallen before the scythe. "To-morrow," said William Laidlaw, "the rakers will be all in the haugh, and I am mistaen if ye hae seen or heard o' a heavier crop in ony part o' England."—"Stupid creatures!" quoth Isobel, "not one o' you can speak a word o' English; ye hae a' the Scottish accent sae strong that it is just perfectly vulgar. Couldna the vicar, as you call him, or his son the student, have taught you a mair refined discourse? You'll be a' Episcopals, I doubt not? And what'll you think o' the kirk o' Holylee, in comparison wi' that chapel o' Ellesmere that Lucy wrote me so long a letter about, wi' its organ, and hymns, and printed prayers?" But Aunt Isobel now spoke to those who understood all her peculiar modes of speech, and knew how rightly to interpret its meanings. Every Sabbath had she, sitting in the kirk of Holylee, thought of them in the chapel of Ellesmere; and whatever differences there might be in their forms of worship, and solemnly attached as she was to her own simple form of faith, deeply did she feel that, wherever a few were gathered together in sincerity, God would be in the midst of them, and mercifully, as He thought fitting, grant their prayers.

Aunt Isobel scrutinised Martha the orphan with kind but keen eyes, and asked and answered a hundred questions. She was much pleased with Martha's plain, quiet, and sensible manners, and declared that she would have known her to be her father's child had she met her at Japan. "Ay, ay, my good Martha, you have been a hard-working lassie, they tell me; and hae worked, too, a' your days, for them that were not o' your ain blood; but you'll lead a different life, my bairn, at Bracken Braes, and we'll a' use you as kindly as we do Lucy herself. O Agnes! don't you see the very glint o' poor Abel's eye there; and there, too, the self-same dimples that showed themselves in ilka cheek whenever he laughed, which was often and often, in the shortest day! for a merrier man than Abel Forester never sang at his work beneath heaven's sunshine."

In a very few days Martha was quite at home at Bracken Braes. She felt with gratitude that the kind promises that had been made to her before she left Westmoreland had been more than realised. At meals, at all their fireside work or leisure, at prayers, in bed (for she slept with Lucy), the once neglected or oppressed orphan now felt herself taken within the affection of many excellent hearts, and gradually becoming familiar with thoughts and feelings of whose existence she had formerly known nothing, but that found out corresponding chords in her own nature. Pleased with herself, thankful to her Maker, every day more and more attached to all the family, and naturally fond of work and averse to all idleness, Martha was soon thought quite a treasure, and her character began to stand high in the parish. The hay harvest went on apace; and Martha, although at first a little puzzled with the Scotch fashion, soon distinguished herself by her perseverance and activity. Jacob Mayne declared she was worth her weight in gold, and held her up as a pattern to his own daughters, who, it must be confessed, were somewhat indolent, and afraid of the sun tanning their skin, and hurting the delicacy of their complexion. Good-humour, contentment, and a willingness to do one's best, are prime qualities in the character of a cottage girl; and although Martha was no beauty, yet they gave a pleasing expression to ordinary enough features; and except Lucy herself, no one, at the close of the week, was more admired in the haugh.

Few states of life are more delightful than the calm and tranquil return into old dear familiar habits, even although they may have been interrupted by a change in itself perfectly happy. Michael's feet knew well all the ground about Bracken Braes, and after the necessary confinement of a new kind of scenery at Ellesmere, he now felt an enlargement of mind in the greater freedom of motion in all his limbs; again the day was subdivided in a way that had long been habitual to him; and all the ongoings of his farm told him perpetually where the sun stood in heaven. Once more, too, he had taken his place as an elder below the pulpit; Mr Kennedy's voice was even pleasanter to his ear than before—no disparagement to the reading of the good vicar; and thoroughly as he had entered into the spirit of the service of the Church of England, yet to him the sanctifying power of years lay upon his own form of worship. Agnes had never hoped to see Bracken Braes more, and to her it was dearer—more beautiful than ever; while Lucy, convincing herself, with many a sigh, that she must never hope to be at Ellesmere again, except in a dream, cherished the remembrance of all its loveliness, without losing any of her attachment to the sweet place of her nativity. Bare, naked, and bleak it was, no doubt, in comparison with that English valley; but in spring and in summer, what place, in its own way, could be more beautiful than the vale of Heriot Water, all the way down from Ladyside to Holylee?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THERE were two causes of distress to Lucy, soon after her return from Westmoreland; her two dearest friends—the highest and the lowest—Emma Cranstoun of the Hirst, and Marry Morrison of Ewebank, were both ill in health and distressed in spirit. Mary had only once been over at Bracken Braes for a single hour, and Lucy had but once visited her in return. Both times the poor creature's eyes had seemed red with weeping; and when a smile crossed her face, it was more woeful than any other expression. She fixed her eyes on Lucy's, as if she had some secret to reveal and confide to her affection; but then would turn away in ghastly silence, and even cover her face with her hands, or for a while disappear. Lucy knew that she had a harsh father, but there seemed now about Mary Morrison a deeper distress than could arise from that cause, which had always existed the same; and Mary herself said, "I canna speak—I daurna speak—but my heart is broken, Lucy, and before winter I may be in my grave, and my soul called to judgment." Lucy breathed not a word to her parents or Aunt Isobel of Mary's melancholy state of mind; but determined to persuade her friend, whom she loved more tenderly than ever, to tell her what secret misery was preying upon her life.

On her visit to the Hirst, at the earnest request of the Lady herself, Lucy was, if possible, even more distressed by her appearance than by that of Mary Morrison. Emma Cranstoun, who, only a few weeks ago, leaped so lightsomely from her palfrey at the cottage doors, was lying on a couch so faint and languid, that she did not rise up on Lucy's entrance into the room, but stretched out her hand, which felt hot and feverish, as Lucy kissed it with tears of affection. "My old malady has come back, my friend; and I fear it must be called a consumption. Yet I am not in that cheerful frame of mind which it is said consumptive persons go with to the very grave. No, my sweet Lucy, my heart is disquieted within me, and I fear to die. Much have I longed for your return; yet now that I see you, I am too weak both in mind and body to enjoy your presence as I always used to do. But sit still—do not go away."

Lucy Forester loved Mary Morrison, as two innocent and humble creatures love each other in equal condition of lowliness. But with her love for the Lady of the Hirst was blended that admiration—that reverence with which a guileless child of poor estate will naturally regard a high-born and beautiful benefactress. From her father's cottage had she come with all humility into the drawing-room of that old hall. Surrounded with all the elegancies, even splendours of rank—little as she was known to value them—now lay with a deep hectic flush upon her cheeks, and with eyes of a brilliancy that pained Lucy's heart she knew not why, the lady whom all the country loved. For Mary Morrison Lucy would have watched night after night—for her would she fearlessly have walked over mountains and moors, in the frost and snow of winter mid-

nights; but for the Lady of the Hirst, she felt that she was ready to die on a moment's warning—willing to leave father, and mother, and all, so that she might purchase life for Emma Cranstoun. That one so so good, so pure, so beautiful beyond compare, so charitable, and so religious, and so far superior in all her looks, words, and motions, to everybody else she had ever seen—that such a being should die, was a thought too dreadful to be endured—even although Lucy well knew that, were it to be so, it would be an instant change from earth to heaven.

"Lucy, I have more comfort in your presence even than in Mr Kennedy's, excellent Christian as he is, and kind to me as if I were his own daughter. Oh! sweet—heavenly sweet were the sounds of that psalm, the first evening I ever was at Bracken Braes! I must get you to sing it to me on my deathbed." Lucy laid her head on the couch and wept; but suddenly a cheering comfort came, she knew not whence, into her heart. "I will sing you every psalm, every hymn I know—but not on your deathbed, lady—for you will recover, and ride about the braes as you used to do, blessing the houses of the poor!"—"Read these letters, Lucy, and tell me what you think; remember the eye of God is at all times on His creatures, and speak the truth."

Little did Lucy Forester know of this world—little of its awful or its mean mysteries—but these miserable letters altogether shocked and baffled her reason. In them the weak or wicked writer told Emma Cranstoun that she was assuredly dying—that her mother and sisters had all died of consumption, which was hereditary in the family—that Mr Kennedy knew nothing of the spirit of the Gospel promises, and that she ought to call in to the aid of her soul some very different minister of Christ, before it was too late, for that after death cometh judgment! Lucy felt an indescribable horror of such a cruel and merciless communication; and, weak and ignorant child as she was, there was a power in her unperverted conscience that appealed, in a few simple words, to the quaking heart of her benefactress. "Oh! best of all ladies that ever brought the blessing of their presence across the threshold of the poor, what sins and iniquities can you have to repent of—what evil thought did your bosom ever conceive—what evil word did your lips ever utter—what evil deed did your hands ever perform? Can my father, and my mother, and Mr Kennedy, and all the rest of the people in the parish, be in the wrong, who all bless your name, and count them happy days since you came to live at the Hirst? No doubt we are all frail, all fallen, all corrupt. The Bible tells us that—but the Bible tells us that there is a Saviour; and if you will let me, I will read you some chapters that will set your heart at rest."

Who may be a wiser interpreter of many of the doctrines of Christianity than an innocent and guileless maiden, who has been brought up at the knee of a father whom religion had reconciled to a sore distress? May such a one not explain the spirit of those passages whose celestial beauty has brought heaven upon her midnight dreams? Meanings perhaps too fine and pure for the comprehension of strongest minds, polluted or deadened by worldly

pursuits, may become familiarly known to such a reader in her simplicity, and flow in eloquence from her lips, when her heart is touched at once with devotion to her Maker, and love for a fallen creature united to her in congenial innocence. The eye of such a meek and humble one falls, as if by a sacred instinct, on the promises of redeeming mercy. If fear and awe mingle with her love, it is but to chasten it into a solemn holiness. The affection she bears to her father on earth is transferred to her Father in heaven, but more tender, still more overpowering, more full of trust—now indeed piety! Then the Word of God explains itself—there is light upon every page; and the young Christian, indeed, enjoys a revelation!

Emma Cranstoun, in the despondency of disease and the solitariness of that old mansion, had kept those pernicious letters below her pillow, and read them so often, that a belief began to settle in her heart that their contents were full of fearful truths, and that they might perhaps have been written by a truly religious spirit, in pity of her lost state. But the sound of Lucy's voice—so earnest in her affection and simplicity—dispelled the horrid dream; she allowed herself to be persuaded that Mr Kennedy knew what Christianity was far better than the writer of such letters; and having got the better of worse fears, she began to hope that perhaps the fear of death might be premature, and that God would yet spare her life for a few years.

For how could life be otherwise than dear to Emma Cranstoun—young, good, beautiful, and rich both in natural endowments and the gifts of fortune? She had an eye to see the loveliness of earth and heaven—feeling, fancy, and imagination to enjoy and to create enjoyment. Whatever happiness a human being might derive from this world and its allowed affections, she might well hope to share; and to shut her eyes for ever upon it all, was a rueful thought, and hard to be borne. But she wished still more earnestly to live, that she might do good, and practise the precepts of her faith. All these desires blended together in her prayers; and although sometimes she upbraided herself with too worldly a love of life, at other seasons she felt assured that her yearning after the good of her fellow-creatures was sincere—and sincere, too, in as far as the frailty of her nature could allow her conviction that there was no virtue but in obedience to the will of God. Sickness such as hers sometimes elevates and sometimes depresses the spirit; but it needs the comfort of human love; and that, in her case, was found in Lucy Forester. "I never sleep, Lucy,—at least, seldom two hours together, and the nights are weary long! but if I had you in the room, methinks I should have pleasant slumbers."—"Me in the room, my beloved lady! My mother is well now; and I have a cousin, you know, at Bracken Braes, to take my place in the house. I beseech you, let me lie beside you, or on the floor close to your bed; a whisper will awake me; and in a short time—in a week or a month at the longest—you will be as well as ever; for, O lady, what mortal creature can do without sleep, and not faint both in body and in soul?"

Some slight opposition was made to the arrangement by an old

lady, a relation of Emma's, who had been a sort of guardian to her since her father's death—not the most judiciously chosen in the world; but it was at once overruled; and a bed being made for Lucy by that of her gracious mistress, it was fixed, by a message to Bracken Braes, that she should remain a month at the Hirst, the friend of Emma Cranstoun—so said the lady herself; but Lucy called herself by another name—not even companion, but servant; and in that name she rejoiced with an humble pride.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The duties which Lucy now daily and hourly discharged, were to her so truly delightful, and so entirely occupied her whole capacity of affection, that it may almost be said her heart was away from Bracken Braes, and bound to the Hirst by a spirit of home-felt happiness. Her love to her parents was so vital, that, like the beatings of that heart, it went on unconsciously; nor was the innocent creature afraid or ashamed even occasionally to forget them, knowing well that they were dearer to her than all the rest of the world. From infancy she had loved, honoured, and obeyed them; and since their return from Westmoreland, she felt that their affection for her had, if possible, increased. More than once they had alluded to her flight to Ellesmere, and in such a way as told Lucy how proud they were of their dutiful daughter. Aunt Isobel had long ceased to scold her on account of that wild adventure, and had even told her, when they two were alone, that she had blessed her on her knees the very hour her flight was known, from the little paper in the Bible. "Yes, my bonny bairn, I thocht o' the fifth commandment—'Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.'" With Emma Cranstoun, therefore, she could reside without being guilty of any neglect of home; and there was nothing to restrain the flow of all her tenderest and warmest feelings towards her benefactress.

In that feeble and languid frame, both of body and mind, into which the Lady of the Hirst had gradually sunk, the perpetual presence of a creature so blithe and joyful, yet at the same time so quiet and humble as Lucy, worked like a very charm, and brought back to her beautiful countenance some of those smiles that had been familiar there for several years of renovated health. The spirit of the invalid, when relapsing into melancholy or frightful trains of thought, was arrested by the motions, the words, or the eyes of her devoted attendant, and brought back to the contemplation of this cheerful world. Lucy narrated to her all that she knew of the histories of the families in the parish; and her knowledge was confined to their good qualities, their enjoyments, or their misfortunes. Her little pictures of life were drawn from what she had seen by humble

hearths; but they were drawn with animation and delight, since the lady was desirous to know from her what thoughts and feelings were familiar at the firesides of the poor. The interest which she took in all such representations made Lucy believe more and more that her own lowly condition was the very happiest that Providence could have bestowed on her; while, on the other hand, Emma Cranstoun drew, from all the tales and stories of the simple girl, a stronger and stronger trust in the power of resignation and faith to support the soul in all extremities. "Let me believe, as all these poor cottagers believe, and my Maker may forgive all my sins, and reconcile me, if it be His will, to an early death."

Lucy had never been at any reading school, but had been taught to read by her father and mother and Aunt Isobel. Ever since the time of her father's blindness, she had read to him two or three hours daily, on an average, and during the dead of winter much more than that; and as her understanding and feelings expanded, nature had taught Lucy her own elocution. She always remembered for whose sake she was performing that pleasant task, and filial love and reverence had inspired intonations most touching and expressive. The books, too, that Lucy had read, were such as gave her, day after day, insights into that nature to which she belonged; and she had learned to think on it with awe, although yet, in her innocence, almost ignorant of its evil. Little, therefore, as Lucy Forester had seen or suffered in that little quiet world, where joy was steady as the daylight, and grief like the mere flitting clouds, she had thoughts and feelings within her heart that rose up to meet whatever was congenial to them, whether offered in conversation of the old, or in the religious books that formed the chief part of her father's library. Emma Cranstoun could not but listen with delighted surprise to many of the young creature's sentiments; and never did she weary of hearing her silver voice reading portions of her favourite authors, with an accent unrefined, no doubt, and with a pronunciation that might have offended very fastidious ears, but with a pathos or an intelligence alternating beautifully with the various meanings of every passage. While Lucy thus cheered the soul of her benefactress, and by sweet, solemn, or sacred compositions brought the dim hush of evening imperceptibly on the daylight that was often nearly gone before the sun had been observed by them to be sinking westwards, she at the same time was enlightening her own mind by these labours of love, and gradually coming to know more and more of herself, her fellow-creatures, and her Creator.

Where now were all Emma Cranstoun's elegant and graceful accomplishments, the fruit of a consummate education successfully pursued? Vain, indeed, did she now hold them all—more vain, perhaps, than they really were; for they were intended to adorn the rejoicing days of health, not to support the despondency of sickness. Her lute, her guitar, and her harp, were now all silent; and the pencil refused to obey her feeble fingers. Yet Lucy, who had in other days often listened in rapture to the witchery of those stringed

instruments, echoing through the saloons of that old hall, or in some secret covert in the huge-armed woods, and had gazed on the lady who touched them as on a creature almost too beautiful for this world, could not join in the dispraise or censure of endowments that, when the soul was not sick, could dispense such pure delight. "In a few weeks, my beloved lady, your hands will again be equal to your music and your drawing; and harm surely there can be none in such gifts as these! Never hearkened I to your singing to the touch of the harp without thinking of hallelujahs in heaven; and sure enough that is the figure of an angel you gave me last summer, drawn by your own hand, with a face hidden in adoration of the Great God, by the foldings of the immortal creature's wings."

Emma Cranstoun possessed much genius, and it was apparent in every trifling work of her hands. She touched nothing, whether it was an article of dress or furniture, or the disposition of a flower-stand, or the arrangement of a rose-bed or border of carnations or lilies, without producing an effect unattainable by common hands. Lucy was not long in catching something of this spirit of beautiful invention. Above all things, she had ever loved, studied, and understood, flowering plants and shrubs, such as, in our cold northern climate, flourished only under shelter. This lore her father had taught her; for Michael Forester, a botanist and a florist, had come at last to know every plant by the touch of its leaves or its flowers; and many rare specimens had been collected at Bracken Braes, some of the finest of which were now sent over to the Hirst, for the lady's own domestic greenhouse, between her parlour and her bedroom. Such were the occupations in which Lucy's hours glided away; and when occasionally visitors came to the Hirst, and the Lady was well enough to receive them, Lucy, who knew her own place and office, soon retired modestly from the room, but seldom or never without causing many a question to be asked concerning one so beautiful in her humility.

The Lady of the Hirst had now recovered so much strength, that of her own accord she allowed Lucy to return home. "I shall be dull without you, Lucy, and my parlour will soon miss your hands. What will become of our greenhouse when you are gone? But you must try to visit me once a-week, if possible; for to you it is but a trip across the braes. I would fain walk with you to the beeches, but I must not leave the temperature of my sick-room. Perhaps I may be feebler—worse—nearer death—when you come to see me again; but, sweet Lucy, the same love will be in my heart." And as she kissed Lucy's cheek, although her own was dry, the kiss touched a gush of tears that were not to be withheld or hidden. "Oh! that you would let me be your servant all the winter; for if you would, it is certain, with the blessing of God, that you would be quite well in the spring!" This proposal was a pleasant one indeed to Emma Cranstoun; and it was arranged that, if Lucy could leave Bracken Braes during the winter without any distress to her parents, she was to be an inmate at the Hirst.

As the old towers of the Hirst disappeared in the woods, and then

the woods themselves in the airy distance, Lucy ceased to reflect, for the present, on the life she had been leading there, and began to think of Mary Morrison and Ewebank. From those pictured walls and hanging curtains, couches and vases, and all the splendid elegancies which to her eyes still wore a charm shed over them by her own young imagination, she turned, without the slightest abatement of love and delight, into that low and somewhat gloomy hut. There Mary was sitting at her wheel, and her father in his chair by the hearth. Lucy's heart always sunk in his presence, for his aspect wore a settled sternness, and his voice wanted that cordial tone, without which even the kindest words are felt to want their most essential charm. Mary's face was even paler and more mournful than ever; and as soon as her eye met Lucy's, it was overspread with a disordered flush far from betokening happiness. "So you have been staying for a month bygone at the Hirst, Miss Lucy," said Abraham, rather ungraciously, and without rising from his chair. "I wish you may not forget your auld friends among sic fine folk. For my ain part, I think Mary there better at hame." Lucy felt that she did not deserve such a reproof, and replied, somewhat eagerly, that she would always be happy to visit at any friend's house where she got a warm welcome. Perhaps she might have said something stronger; but on looking towards Mary, who was stooping down her head, as if busy with disentangling her threads, she observed the tears fast falling, and in a moment changed her voice and her face into her usual sweetness. "No, no, Mr Morrison; I love your daughter Mary better—if indeed that be possible—even than the Lady of the Hirst. We two are equal in condition, although I am somewhat younger in years; and if you, sir, would be glad to see me here, I will come over to Ewebank every week." The perfect simplicity and sincerity of these words touched Abraham's self-tormenting and discontented spirit; and he told Lucy to sit down, for that she was, he verily believed, the best girl in the parishes either of Ferns or of Holylee. Already by this time were Mary's tears wiped away, and there was something almost like cheerfulness in the house.

Mary Morrison said that she would accompany Lucy part of the way to Bracken Braes, and they walked on in silence. But just as Mary turned about to communicate some sorrow, Edward Ellis was seen bounding down the hill; so she hastily wrung Lucy's hand, and, with a face of deep melancholy, returned to Ewebank.

It was not possible for Lucy's heart not to throw off much of its sadness, whether for her own sake or that of others, on this sudden appearance of Edward Ellis. Circumstances had prevented her from seeing much of him since her return from Ellesmere, and she had never been alone in his company since that midnight journey among the mountains. The many affecting thoughts that had almost ever since possessed her heart, had by no means excluded his image; but they had certainly hindered it from occupying her waking and her sleeping dreams so fully as it had once done, and had subdued her affection down to what might now, with some truth perhaps, have been called the affection of a sister. Serene in her sense of duty

towards her parents and her friends, Lucy met his approach with a countenance sparkling with unconcealed happiness; and she expressed, in words that came from the very heart, her delight at this unexpected meeting. "I never liked, Mr Ellis, to say all I thought before people, even before my father and my mother themselves; but now that we are alone, I pray to Heaven to bless you and yours, in your own country or in foreign parts, all your life. Your goodness to me has been beyond all gratitude; and sometimes, sir, remember on the Sabbaths that there is ane praying for you in the kirk o' Holylee."

Edward Ellis was little more experienced in this life than Lucy Forester herself; and as he ventured to kiss those soft blue eyes that, as they smiled upon him, swam with misty tears, he felt that she was dearer to him than he knew in her simplicity, and not to be parted from for ever without an indefinite despondency and distress. It seemed to him as if Lucy had grown nearer to woman's height and form since the night he had met her at the linn; that her countenance had lost something of its more childish prettiness, but had gained unspeakably in the expression of intelligence and feeling; and that even her voice was tuned to a deeper softness, that thrilled to his very heart. Neither had that month's residence at the Hirst been thrown away upon one so quick to perceive and learn: an unconscious air of grace, beyond what is native to the cottage, was visible over her demeanour; and in her dress, still suitable to the Shepherdess of Bracken Braes—the name by which he had loved to call her—there was a rustic elegance, no doubt finely imitated, or rather inspired, from that of Emma Cranstoun. Like a bird, too, escaped from a happy confinement which it had no wish to leave, but still rejoicing in its new-found liberty, Lucy once more felt elated in the open air of the braes, and now bounded along the heather, not so lightly indeed as not to bend down the purple fruit-stalks—for that is done by the leveret and the lapwing—but so lightly and so quickly too, that it was not without some effort that Edward Ellis, who was esteemed active even among the hill-side shepherds, kept pace with her gladsome career.

But they stood together by a little spring, known only to hunters and shepherds, overshadowed by a rock, whose base was covered with brier, broom, and bracken, and from whose cleft summit grew one solitary drooping birch-tree. "Lucy, I am about to leave Holylee; I know not if for ever. No—no—not for ever; yet it may be years before I return to visit Mr Kennedy and your father. A change has been suddenly made in the plan of my education, and to-morrow I go away. Will you accept a few keepsakes? Never again shall I meet with so sweet a maiden as Lucy Forester, nor one whom I love so well." Lucy had scarcely power to reply; but with a faltering voice and trembling hand she accepted them, and, after a few inarticulate words of affection, put them, without looking what they were, into her bosom.

Edward Ellis knew not what was the nature of his feelings, nor what ought now to be his conduct. His boyish passion, at least delightful affection, for Lucy Forester had, for nearly a year past,

been growing with his growth; and now that he had even expressed it, he felt as if Lucy were betrothed to him by her kind acceptance of his love-gifts. But what could that word "betrothed" mean, between him, a mere boy, and the daughter, still younger, of a man in Michael Forester's humble situation of life? Again he fixed his gazing eyes upon her, and her beauty was more and more irresistible. "When I return, Lucy, after a few years, I shall find you married to Isaac Mayne, the famous scholar."—"Never, never." And Lucy, unrestrained by shame or pride, now wept bitterly; for thoughts over which she had no power came in a tumult into her heart, and almost stopped its beatings, quick and strong as they had for some moments been in that sudden colloquy. There had been a dream enveloping her, which yet she had not known to be a dream, till now she saw it dissolving with all its enchantments. Now had she the first agonising insight into her own heart, and into many feelings that lay couched there, strong as life itself—feelings that had been rising there in rapid growth every hour since that travel, side by side with Edward Ellis, beneath the moon and stars. A sudden gladness was breathing over her soul—an intimation given that grief is a guest in every human breast—a voice whispering that she must forbid that glee in which she had revelled from the first morning-light—that she must tame the fairy flight of those footsteps over the daisied green—that the laughter indulged to childhood must be now restrained—and that tears, or a calmness more sorrowful than tears, must often now subdue the smiles that had hidden her eyes, as it were, in their own kindling light. Something was to be removed soon, sudden, and for ever, that, unknown to herself, had been the chief bliss of life. Her brother Edward was no more to visit Bracken Braes! yet even in that fit of grief her heart acknowledged him to be her brother; for what affection could be more sisterly, pure, and irreproachable? What although a few sobs were heard! Yet was that affection not to cease—not to be utterly extirpated—but by absence and separation kept down within the heart, till reason and religion should overmaster it, before affection became love, and love trouble, and then the whole of life, by night and by day, in the lonesome glen, or the crowded house of God, infested by one dream never to be broken—stronger even than piety or superstition, and colouring all the humblest incidents of life with one hue, till the soul, formerly free in its wandering innocence, should be enslaved at last beneath the bondage of one unrelenting passion.

A shepherd came up unperceived to the Hawkstane Spring; and, relieved by this interruption, Edward and Lucy accompanied him down to the Heriot Water. The presence of an indifferent person soon calms even the strongest emotion, and before they reached Bracken Braes, the brother and sister, or, if it must be so, the youthful lovers, were, if not cheerful, almost again happy.

Mr Kennedy had been there only an hour before, and had acquainted them with Mr Ellis's intended departure next morning. Every one was, if possible, kinder and more tenderly respectful to the noble youth than they had ever intentionally been before; and when, at

last, he reluctantly rose to go, not without a choked voice and tears in his eyes, Michael Forester stood up and blessed him with a fervent voice. As for the rest, they were unable to speak; and when they found that Edward Ellis was indeed gone, they wondered how they could have suffered him to depart without expressions of greater affection.

Agnes said to Lucy that she seemed fatigued with her walk, and desired her to retire to rest. She was fain to escape to her little lonely room, and weep there unobserved. The Lady of the Hirst, as some thought, in a dying state—Mary Morrison unhappy—and Edward Ellis gone away for ever! But her prayers calmed her heart; and in little more than an hour, when Aunt Isobel slipped into her room to give her the usual farewell kiss for the night, Lucy Forester was asleep, and her face as tranquil as that of a child in its cradle.

CHAPTER XXX.

The morning on which Lucy was to leave home for a whole winter, rose bright and beautiful, and all the family assembled cheerfully under the plane-tree to bid her a happy farewell. Her parents were the proudest people in the whole world; but theirs was a pride indulged in profoundest gratitude to the Giver of all Mercies. Their child was beloved over all the parish, and in every house she had friends; but she was now going to become the chosen companion of her whose very smiles were a blessing; and they felt that, in case of their own death, Lucy would have an asylum at the Hirst, where the orphan could well repay her benefactress for the protection of her innocence. Therefore, so far from its looking like a parting scene, every face kindled with pleasure as at a return. Michael stood with his calm countenance in the morning light turned affectionately towards his child, as happy as any man in existence. Agnes had herself assisted Lucy in dressing, and regarded her with a mother's admiring eyes, as her beauty shone with a more joyful lustre, in the consciousness of her neatly-ordered array, and the anticipation of Emma Cranstoun's embrace. Aunt Isobel said that she now loved Martha so well, that she would never miss Lucy; but reminded her at the same time, with a hand fondly laid on her bosom, that once a-week had she promised to see them all at Bracken Braes, and never to miss a single Sabbath at the kirk of Holylee. Martha was sincerely happy at her kind cousin's good fortune, and expressed her happiness in her usual homely language. So away danced Lucy across the hills—her last kiss, and her last whisper—perhaps a tear—having been given as his due to her blind father.

"Where now is Edward Ellis?" thought Lucy, with a sigh, as she glided up and down the solitary places—the rocks and braes, the mosses and the coppice-woods, through which he had accom-

panied her but a few weeks ago. With something like pain and reluctance, she turned aside to the little shaded spring, on whose mossy brink they had sat and conversed so affectionately, like brother and sister. That pleasant dream was vanished; the same blue unclouded sky was reflected in the water, but a dead silence lay around; and that delightful voice and those beaming eyes were gone, and for ever. Lucy took from her bosom some of the small memorials of his affection, which, for reasons she scarcely knew, she had always concealed from every eye, and unconsciously put them to her lips. "God bless him all his days," was the prayer she breathed, as she returned the trifles to the fair warmth of her breast, which in a few minutes beat with all its wonted tranquillity.

It was a clear October day, the sky perfectly settled, the air pure as pure might be, and a slight frost, beautiful as dew, lying yet unmelted over the discoloured heather. Lucy looked back to the happy parting below the plane-tree, and forwards to the Hirst, and all sad thoughts either faded away, or were tinged with the joyfulness of a hopeful spirit. "Why sit singing there, sweet robin-redbreast, on a briery stone pillar in the moors? The summer days are all over and gone, and in another month may be coming the snow. Away, sweet robin-redbreast!—away to Bracken Braes, and trill that bit short merry sang o' thine frae the roof o' the barn, till not a leaf is left on our plane-tree; and then keep hopping about the door, and in and out of the window, as you have done for seven winters."

Lucy was now nearly half-way to the Hirst; for she was standing on a small eminence called the Gowan Green, where Mary Morrison and she had often sat together for hours in their plaids, both in gloom and in sunshine. Here they had often waited for each other, on those days when it was known that Lucy was going to the Hirst; and when not lucky enough to meet, each betokened her disappointment by a bunch of heather or wildflowers laid on the middle of that platform. It was not easy to imagine a place more solitary. No streamlets here murmured along the bases of the hills that came close together without any intervening valleys, however narrow; but just below the eminence lay a little lake or tarn, not much larger than a pond, self-fed, and black with its moorland water. The long heather quite surrounded it, except on the side of the Gowan Green, which sloped away down to the margin, with its short smooth pasture. A number of large loose stones—for they could hardly be called rocks—lay here and there upon the water edge, and a few birch-trees were sprinkled among the stunted hazels. There were no features belonging to the scene that could be called beautiful; yet on a fine day the lonesome place was pleasant in its silence, and in spring or early summer there was constantly here the sweet fragrance of whins, broom, and brier, with which was intermingled that of many unnoticed wildflowers, as well as that of the lady-fern and of the birches, some of which, eaten down by the sheep, were not much taller than that graceful plant. Lucy and Mary had once passed a whole summer Sabbath here, without any interruption, from morning to night. It so happened that there had

been no Divine service either at Holylee or the Ferns; and here the two happy creatures had agreed to pass the whole day, reading their Bibles, singing hymns in the wilderness, and talking over all the concerns of their young and innocent life.

Ewebank, the house of Mary Morrison, was not very far off; and Lucy, knowing how early in the morning it yet was, resolved to surprise her by a visit before, perhaps, her hearth was kindled. Looking down upon the tarn, behold, upon the stony edge of the water, she saw a female figure, with her face covered with her hands, and a man standing beside her, apparently in great agitation. The figure lifted up its face for a moment, and she knew that it was Mary Morrison. The man paced to and fro a short distance, and ever and anon stood close beside Mary, with violent gesticulations, and attitudes bespeaking rage and hatred. At length he seized Mary by the hair, who fell down on her knees, and clasped her hands together in supplication. In his right hand there seemed to be a large stone, picked up from the edge of the tarn; and all at once Lucy knew that he was about to be a murderer. The dead silence of the lonesome place, and the furious looks of the ruffian, quailed Lucy's heart within her, and her first impulse was to fly back towards Bracken Braes, or sink down where she stood, in concealment among the heather; but her love for meek Mary Morrison, the first and best friend of her youth, prevailed, and, uttering a wild cry, she flew down the hill-side towards the tarn, and in a few moments was at her side. Mary fixed her eyes upon her friend with a wild look, and then upon him whose hand had suddenly let go its grasp of the wretched creature's hair, and said, quakingly—"O Mark Thornhill! Mark Thornhill! have pity upon us—murder us not; for we are baith young, and, as for me, sair need hae I o' repentance." The stone fell from his right hand—the paleness of fear seemed to pass over the deadly scowl of wrath—and his knees knocked against each other in the sudden remorse of an unacted crime. But still an evil demon kept whispering in his ear, that Mary and Lucy were yet in the power of the criminal. Mary Morrison, who had felt that her last hour was come, had not strength to rise up from her knees, but sunk down altogether, and lay insensible among the hard flints of the beach. For a short time not a word was uttered, but all was silent in the fear of death that still overshadowed that solitary place.

Lucy knew nothing of the dreadful mystery in which she had all at once been involved; but her courage did not desert her, and she beseeched Mark Thornhill—for she caught his name in Mary's indistinct supplications—to look upon them both without anger, and that God would forgive and reward him for his pity. That hand which had been clenched to do a deed of death, could not now have hurt a hair of Mary Morrison's head: it was quelled by the sudden beauty of that fearless innocence coming upon him, as if from heaven, to save him from perdition. He had received a reprieve from crime. Mary ventured to lift up her face from the sand, and saw that he was not relentless. "Swear—swear that you are not my wife, and that you will never claim me as your husband."—"I

swear it." said Mary, and again bowed down her head. Her betrayer moved slowly and sullenly away, and, disappearing over the Gowan Green, left Mary and Lucy alone on the brink of the Ouzel Loch.

Guilt and its miseries had hitherto been to Lucy Forester like the words of a strange tongue. And now nothing distinct—nothing that could be borne to be thought of, had entered her mind. But there lay meek Mary Morrison, ashamed to look her in the face, and uttering no words but these—"This will break my father's heart—this will break my father's heart. O Lucy! gang away to the Hirst, and leave me here to die; for when you ken what I am now, your eyes will smile on me never mair; and yet I surely think they will weep for me when I am dead and buried in sin, and shame, and sorrow!" Lucy was weeping for her already; nor had these dismal words any power to deaden her affection. She assisted Mary to rise from that cruel bed, and in a little while was sitting with an arm round her neck, where they had so often sat and sang in their joy—on a knoll in the centre of the Gowan Green.

There was for a long time sobbing and sighing, and then dead silence. Lucy was the first to speak. "Mary, Mary, will you hear me? Well, then, here before our Father who is in heaven, and Him who died for us, do I upon my knees say unto you, that I will never forsake you—that I will not only pity you, and pray for you night and day, but I will love you better, far better than ever: let others do as they may, I at least will be the same to you as ever: yes, Mary, I will love you beyond all living creatures but my father and mother. If I do not, may the gates of yonder blue skies never be opened to me by the hands of God's holy angels!"

Mary Morrison was yet too young to be sick of life. Solitary, and, but for Lucy, friendless as that life had been, still it had too much sunshine to be exchanged, without dismay, for the darkness of the grave. Even shame, she began to think, might be borne, if Lucy would but continue to look on her with unaverted and unchanged eyes in her disgrace. "Perhaps even my father may be brought to forgive me!" But that was a transient thought; for although she loved her father, she feared that forgiveness was not in his nature for such a crime. Suddenly her heart burned within her, and, kneeling down beside Lucy, who was still on her knees, she exclaimed—"God will bless you, Lucy, for this! but hear me now, and believe me when I say that I am not so guilty as people will think. I will keep my oath, Lucy, for you heard me swear; but to you who saw so much, I may speak without being forsworn. Guilty as I am, yet in the sight of Heaven am I his wife, and Mark Thornhill is my husband! Yes, Lucy, we were married before two witnesses, and Mark gave me a paper, saying I was his wife; but, waes me! he does not care for me now—he has sent the witnesses out of the way; and as for the writing, he tore it out of my bosom this dreadful morning, and it is destroyed for ever. Nacbody will ever believe now that we were married; and, oh! how can I face my father?"

In a few hours—for hours indeed passed by, and the sun was high

in heaven—Mary Morrison had told Lucy her history over and over again many, many times, and she began to feel even some relief from her conscience in her friend's unabated affection. She even ventured to think it possible that Lucy's father and mother would not altogether forsake her in her shame—for shame there was indeed to be, worse than all other evils except death. But then she thought of her own father, and her heart died within her; for she knew too well that, as soon as she confessed to him, never again would she be allowed to darken the door of Ewebank.

At last they parted—Mary to her father's, and Lucy (for one night, and one night only) to the Hirst; for she was determined to tell everything she durst to her father, and beseech him to go over in the morning to Ewebank.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Lucy left the Hirst before morning had entirely dimmed the stars, and had to tap for admission into the house, at the window of her father's room, for sleep yet held all the family at Bracken Braes. The story she had to tell about Mary Morrison greatly disturbed her parents and Aunt Isobel; and for a while Lucy feared that her unhappy friend was to be deserted in her misery. Michael, Agnes, and Isobel were all too sensible of their own failings and frailties, and too religiously impressed with a habitual sense of the utter weakness of human nature, to judge and condemn sternly the errors or sins of their fellow-Christians. But this was a case that it was necessary to understand perfectly before they could decide what was their duty. They were bound by love, nature, and religion, to protect their daughter from all stain of pollution, and to sever her inexorably from her tenderest friendships, rather than suffer her to incur any danger, however slight, of being contaminated by evil example. They all loved Mary Morrison, and could not easily believe in her guilt; but they knew how many shades of sin darken the actions of us mortal creatures, and perhaps that poor girl, although more the object of pity than blame, had nevertheless grievously erred. From Lucy's story, they saw enough to determine them all to give Mary their compassion, their condolence, and their support in the agony of her affliction, in so far as that could be done without violating the awful sanctity of the moral law, and thereby tainting, perhaps, the very atmosphere in which their own Lucy breathed. They all remembered Mary's meekness and modesty—her unrepining gentleness under the severities of a cruel parent—her grateful disposition—indeed almost too grateful—to them at Bracken Braes; for even the commonest courtesies and kindnesses, and that deep sense of religion, which, more constantly than with any one they knew, influenced her whole conduct and demeanour,

and made her, without excepting even their own Lucy, the most perfect model of a Christian daughter.

Lucy was altogether overcome by the thought that her father and mother might be about to leave Mary Morrison to her fate. True to her promise to that unfortunate creature, she had not disclosed all she knew, and thus her pleadings for her beloved friend had been, in their most passionate earnestness, perplexing and imperfect. At last she hinted that there was a secret that must not be revealed, and by degrees her father came to understand something of its nature, and of the obligation Lucy had come under to observe silence. The clear and high understanding of Michael Forester was not to be deceived by the sophistry which fear and shame had whispered to the hearts of his daughter and her friend. The truth must be told, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, else God, the Searcher and Judge of all hearts, would not be well pleased. Promises and oaths, by whomsoever extorted under such circumstances, must be given to the winds, and a full confession made before God and man of the sin, and of the aggravating or palliating circumstances with which it might have been attended. There was no speck, no dimness on the eye of Michael Forester's mind, and he saw that here there was selfish, and licentious, and cruel guilt, trampling upon abused and terrified innocence. "This," said the blind man, "with the blessing of God, must not be, and I feel myself called upon to be the minister of His eternal justice."

What tears poured down the pale face of Agnes, and what fear quaked within her heart, when Lucy narrated all that had happened at the Ouzel Loch! "Manifestly the arm of mercy was over our child, Michael, else had that bonny head of hers been laid cruelly in the dust." Lucy was too anxious about Mary Morrison to hear even the just commendation of herself, although coming from the lips of those whom it was the sole object of her life to make happy; and she only exclaimed, "You will not forsake Mary now, father, should she be driven from Ewebank? O will you—say that you will receive her into our ain house; for unless we do so, her heart will break, and before the end of the week Mary Morrison will be in her grave."—"Yes, my Lucy, if she needs it, the door of Bracken Braes shall be open to her; nor do I fear although her head should even lie on the same pillow with that of my own child."

Michael and Lucy were not long in setting out for Ewebank. Few words were spoken as they crossed the solitary hills and valleys, for Michael was settling in his own mind all that ought to be said to the father of Mary Morrison. On reaching Ewebank, Lucy saw him walking about distractedly, with his grey head uncovered, in a small garden close to the hut. A frown was settled on his forehead and all about his eyes as firmly as if it had been their constant expression—his cheeks seemed rigid, and his white lips quivered as in convulsions. In a low voice, Lucy described to her father his agitated state. "This is indeed a distressing affliction, Abraham, and I feel for you; for I, too, have but an only child. I have ventured over to pray with you—to comfort you in any way one Christian may

comfort another; and especially, my worthy friend, to inform you of something that goes far to prove your daughter's innocence."—"May the curse of God cleave to her—the wages of sin are death!" and he again paced to and fro with clenched hands, and eyes uplifted to heaven in savage supplication. "May I ask where she is, Abraham? But I beseech you, by Him who died for us on the tree, not to curse the daughter of Alice Gray!" That name rooted the angry sufferer to the ground; but again he tore himself away, and cried aloud—"Yes—I curse her, and may she be cursed, for she has covered these white hairs with shame;" and he flung down a handful of his long silvery locks, and trampled upon them with his feet. Lucy was terrified at the sight, and, retiring to a little distance, sat down upon a bank. "Where is your daughter, Abraham? for I feel as if God sent me here to reconcile you unto her."—"Call her not my daughter, for daughter she is none of mine; neither know I where the prostitute has hidden herself from my wrath—in the moor, or in the mosses, or the Ouzel Loch. Never again may these eyes behold her in life." And at these words he burst out into hideous laughter, all drenched in a flood of tears, and fell down with great violence to the earth.

Michael heard the fall, and Lucy was coming to his assistance, when, issuing silently as a ghost from the birch wood, the edge of which came almost close upon the garden, Mary Morrison was already on her knees, with her father's head supported on her bosom. "This is my doing, Mr Forester—all my wicked doing: you had far better leave me to my death, after you have recovered my father. O that he could be taken over to Bracken Braes, and comforted back again into his reason. As for me, it is but just that I should die. But see—see, Lucy, his eyes are opening, and now he shuts them upon me, for I am hateful in my sin, and most loathsome to my father's soul. I must hide myself again in the thicket among the briars: if I touch him, perhaps he will kill me. O Mr Forester! invite him over to Bracken Braes, and tell him that I have fled out of the parish, to pollute his eyes never mair on this side o' the grave." Mary Morrison then started up, and disappeared.

That paroxysm had in some measure allayed the passion in Abraham Morrison's spirit, by the weakness which it induced over his entire frame. He almost seemed as if a palsy had stricken him; but by-and-by he revived, and in a sort of stupor walked into the house, followed by Michael and Lucy. Unconscious of his actions, he sat down as usual in his chair by the hearth-side, on which no fire was burning, and his hand falling violently upon that book which speaks only of mercy and forgiveness, he again uttered an indistinct curse upon his child. It appeared that he had been reading the Bible; but some evil spirit had turned over the leaves, and the balm of consolation was to him poison, bitter and mortal. Lucy stood trembling behind her father, and then said in a whisper—"I will go to Mary in the wood."

Perhaps Abraham Morrison knew not that any one was in the room, for now his words seemed to be uttered as if to himself in

solitude. "If ever I forgive her, may I be unforgiven! If she dies in childbirth, and I shed a tear, may it sink like a spark of hell into my heart!" Then gazing on Michael Forester, he started up, and cried with a loud voice—"What brought you hither, Mr Forester? Go home and watch your own child—for young as she is, and with a smile upon her face, how know you that she may not be a sinner, and up to the lips in pollution?"—"Abraham Morrison," said the blind man, standing like a prophet, with his outstretched arm, and tall figure straight and still in its majesty of command—"Abraham Morrison, remember that you are a father, and that none other but the hand of the Almighty can break that bond that ties you all the days of your life to your child. Be she even guilty, the voice of the great God commands you to forgive her; for in His sight you are far guiltier than she. Yes, Abraham Morrison, your sins have been many, and they have been done under the shadow of grey hairs: hers have been few, and this—I know it well—this is the poor creature's birthday, and she is but seventeen years! But hearken unto me, Abraham; I command you to hearken unto me: your daughter's heart is unpolluted, and if her father deserts her, then, this very night, shall she sleep in my own Lucy's arms. Grant, O God! thy blessing on this afflicted house." And Michael Forester stood a little while with his head gently bowed, and his hands uplifted in the attitude of prayer.

It is in the power of a strong and stubborn heart not only to harden itself against all natural affection, but to triumph in what it strives within itself to consider in the light of a sacrifice. So was it now with Abraham Morrison. He knew well—it was not possible to keep that knowledge from his conscience—that he had denied his daughter all the harmless amusements and pastimes of youth; that he had closed his heart against her in all his domestic hours, finding at last a sullen satisfaction in tyrannising over the gentle, and obedient, and unrepining creature, whom he could not but love; that he had often left her quite alone in that solitary hut for long days together, and uncared for and unguarded among the hills; and now that evil had befallen her innocence, instead of looking into his own unfatherly conduct, he steeled himself against her in his very remorse, and took refuge in the excommunication of his own flesh and blood from the privileges of nature. It was all in vain for Michael Forester to exculpate her, or palliate her transgression. She herself had, the night before, told her own pitiable story, but, under the terror of that oath, had said not a word against her betrayer and her murderer. The stern old man adhered cruelly to her own confession, and all Michael's words rebounded back as if from a rock. He too, who thus unmercifully judged his daughter's transgression, thought far more of himself, and the shame that had fallen upon him, than of her guilt in the eyes of her Maker, or even of the Eternal's goodness to His fallen creatures. The eyes and the tongues of men were to him not endurable in their scorn and condemnation; and his pride wished that, rather than this disgrace, his daughter had been drowned, or had perished in fire. He had borne ill his many worldly

misfortunes, and although his integrity had been unimpeached, he repined in his poverty. His crops had been oftener withered or blasted, he thought, than those of his neighbours; diseases came among his cattle more frequently than among theirs; and nothing prospered about Ewebank ever since he had been its tenant. There had always been an evil eye upon the place, and now the whole phials of wrath had been poured out, and he was ready to curse God and die. "Go home, Mr Forester—go home with your daughter, and leave me in my misery. As for her, if she cross my threshold again, may she drop down dead upon the floor."

Lucy came into the room, and, taking her father's hand to lead him out, they left the hut unnoticed by the wretched man, who sat with his eyes sullenly fixed upon the dead ashes on the hearth. They entered the birch wood by a small glade, and there Mary Morrison was lying upon the ground. "O father!" said Lucy, "we must take Mary with us, for she has been all night long in this very place, afraid even of her life, so fiercely did her father rage against her; and if left here, she will surely die." Michael took her into his arms, and kissed her cheek, but he could not see, what Lucy wept to behold, the mark of violence upon her face, no doubt from her father's hand, although Mary had said not a word of that cruelty, and beseeched them both to forgive him, for that her misconduct had driven him to distraction.

They once more passed near the door of the hut, but nothing stirred within; and Mary, who was almost helpless from her sufferings, permitted herself to be taken away from Ewebank, and, without speaking a single word all the way, found herself at Bracken Braes.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Lucy's visit to the Hirst was necessarily delayed, at least for a few days, till the mental agonies of Mary Morrison might be assuaged by the tenderest sympathies of those who seemed indeed now to be her only friends on earth. Not a word of forgiveness came from her own unrelenting father, and she was indeed an orphan. Few friends had she ever had to cheer her solitary life, and those few deserted her in her disgrace. Abraham Morrison was but a poor man, and therefore people, whom his disagreeable character had repelled from Ewebank, had no selfish inducement now to offer any comfort in his affliction. He became an object of blame rather than of pity, although both feelings might well have been entertained towards him; and his daughter's fall was, at every fireside, laid to the charge of his austerity or indifference. This Abraham knew, and, while his heart acknowledged that the charge was true, yet he sullenly regarded those by whom it was made, and his conscience hardened itself in pride against those haunting visitations that come upon the

lonely hours of every man that forgets or violates any of the great natural duties. He continued obdurate in his unrelenting misery within the gloom of his hut, and not one of the few neighbours who had gone to see him repeated the visit, for they saw that their interference only served to embitter the poison on which he fed. He took an old pauper into his house, stricken with many of the infirmities of age, but who, silent in her deafness and indifference to life, could yet bring water from the well, dig up vegetables from the garden, prepare his meals, which now he scarcely asked God to bless, and make that bed on which he had lain with open eyes ever since his daughter had sunk into sin and shame; for from these words he would not depart, and dwelt upon them till his whole mind was exclusively filled with hideous and dreadful images.

Meanwhile, various judgments were passed on the unfortunate girl and her friends at Bracken Braes. It would sometimes seem as if the human heart, even in a state of comparative innocence and simplicity, found a pleasure in the worst distresses that can befall our common nature; and eyes that ought to overflow with compassion, are often averted from suffering with a coldness that is indeed absolute cruelty. The young feared to pity Mary Morrison, lest their own purity might be suspected; and the old lost, in their anxiety for the virtue of their own children, the common feelings of humanity for her who had deviated from its paths. The censure was generally loud, the pity in a whisper; and when, in a week or two, gentler judgments and feelings arose, people were beginning to lose an interest in what did not immediately concern themselves; and Mary Morrison's name, if not forgotten, was unpronounced, as if by general agreement. Neither was the conduct of Michael Forester and his wife allowed to pass without many comments—some of them by no means favourable; but his commanding character silenced open blame, and Michael was not a man to heed the opinions of the timid or uninformed, in a case where his duty shone clearly before him, and where nature and religion alike bade him shelter the orphan head. He did by no means despise the opinions of his fellow-creatures; but his conscience was his monitor, and a monitor enlightened by the Bible. Therefore no misgivings assailed the constancy of his protecting affection towards poor Mary Morrison; and he determined to see her vindicated before the eyes of men, as he believed her to be nearly so in the eyes of God.

The intensity of Lucy's love for Mary Morrison rendered her wholly indifferent to any painful rumours accidentally overheard; and she also reposed a perfect reliance on the judgment of her parents and Aunt Isobel, which would always have reconciled her conscience to anything they approved. But when she was given to understand that the Lady of the Hirst no longer desired her attendance, then indeed a pang pierced her heart, and she wept sorely over the loss of such friendship. Emma Cranstoun was the very soul of candour, intelligence, and pity; but to one in her situation, the knowledge of what is transacting in the houses of the poor must

often come in baneful whispers, and, in cases of error or misfortune, can scarcely fail of being perplexing and imperfect. Lucy herself she had not seen; and with one so very young it would not have been possible to converse on such a subject. Emma Cranstoun, therefore, heard the truth with every accompaniment of falsehood, even from those who did not mean either to deceive or traduce. The unhappy girl's stay at Bracken Braes she felt to place an insuperable impediment in the way of her friendship with Lucy Forester; and while she still continued to think with affection and gratitude of all her services, and with almost unimpaired admiration of her character, nevertheless a necessity was imposed upon her to release Lucy from her engagement at the Hirst. Such another attendant on her sick-bed she well knew was nowhere to be found; but she could not in this matter run counter, not only to the determined resolution of Mrs Ramsay, but to the implied advice and open remonstrances of all her other friends.

The loss of the Lady's love was to Lucy like the darkening of the daylight. For several years she had felt her own nature elevated by constant communion with such a perfect being as, in her enthusiasm, she not very erroneously considered Emma Cranstoun; and to be not only severed from that communion, but thought no longer worthy of it, sunk Lucy in her own esteem; and deprived of that stay, she seemed to sink away back into an inferior condition, such as had contented her childhood before that beautiful and beneficent creature had ever been seen at Bracken Braes. But for whose sake had she sustained this great loss? For meek Mary Morrison, with whom she had never had one unkind word—with whom she had sat in the same plaid a hundred times before she ever knew that the Lady of the Hirst was in existence—whom she had called her sister, and, indeed, loved as if they had lain in one cradle—and towards whom at all times profoundest pity had mingled an inexpressible charm with the joyfulness of affection. Lucy now turned back her heart to the past, and remembered many many words and looks, during several years, which she had but little attended to, but which now affected her with the knowledge of unhappiness borne uncomplainingly by the poor girl whose mother was dead, and whose father was little disposed to supply her loss. She wondered how she could ever have been so blind as not to see Mary's wretchedness at home, and thought now how much better it would have been to have wept along with her than to have talked merrily, and laughed too, in the sunshine of bygone summer days. But now amends will be made for all such oversight—and sooner will the bird forget its nest, than Lucy to supply hourly comfort to her sister. Mary Morrison had never spoken much even in her happier days—for gentle smiles and affectionate eyes filled up the pauses of their artless talk; but now not a smile was seen—those eyes, as it was fitting they should do, rested on the ground, and shunned the sunshine—and her pale lips were mute, except when a sigh would have its utterance, and her bosom heaved in agony to think that one human being could have had the heart to use another as Mark

Thornhill had used her, without pity or repentance, and yet knowing all the time that there was a God in heaven.

But it was not her own loss alone that affected Lucy, when she thought of the Lady of the Hirst. "For what hands can tend her so carefully as mine would have done?—what eyes will open at midnight so readily as mine did at the slightest whisper, or whenever my beloved benefactress moved her head upon the pillow? No—not one in all Scotland could serve her like me; or, like me, go with her, if she chose, to the uttermost parts of the earth!" Then something like pride—a stirring of that elevated spirit which virtue breathes into the simplest and humblest heart, and which may prostrate itself wholly before Him alone from whose throne it comes—rose to Lucy's support, and made her lift up her head undepressed, with all its golden ringlets, till again the lady, lying languid, and faint, and feverish on her couch—perhaps all alone in that vast and solitary hall—appeared before her; and then fain would Lucy have knelt before that image, and beseeched her once more to restore to favour the servant once beloved, and now more devoted than ever, although the light of that countenance was, alas, withdrawn!

In a month's time the heart of Mary Morrison in some degree revived. Nothing but guilt need be permanently miserable; and that faith which she had learnt from her infancy, and which, with all his other lamentable faults, her father had venerated, outwardly at least, before his daughter, was not found a cold and barren creed, now that she read her Testament with eyes that dropt tears on every page. Truly parental tenderness now met her on every occasion, however small, on which it could be shown. So much affection, she thought, surely could not thus be felt by the good for her, if she were quite worthless. No restraint was laid on her intercourse with Lucy; and, above all things else, that thought would comfort her even on the bed of death. "Michael and Agnes Forester let their innocent child sleep in my bosom: and, O merciful God! forgive him, and inspire with another heart, who has fixed upon it a stain of pollution; for I thought that I was his wife, and my sin was more in ignorance than from a corrupted heart; so, at least, I humbly hope to be judged at the great day."

The unprincipled man who had thus betrayed the unsuspecting and unprotected innocence of Mary Morrison, had left the country, and no one knew where he had gone; but Michael Forester communicated all her case to Mr Kennedy, and they did not doubt that it would be in their power some day to establish proofs of her marriage. Meanwhile, Mary accompanied the family to church; and although on the first Sabbath the trial was terrible, and she would fain have sunk and disappeared down among the bones and skulls and rotten coffins of the grave, when she felt hundreds of eyes, all dreadfully dazzling, upon her face, and searching pitilessly into her soul; yet that coarse curiosity could not sustain itself against one so perfectly humbled in contrition, and sitting between such friends as Agnes and Lucy. On the fourth Sabbath, the few looks that sought her out were of the most compassionate character, and

sufficient to show that innocence will ultimately triumph, even in this world, dark and disastrous as may be its days of sufferings. Her father belonged to another congregation; but he was never out of Mary's sight during the whole time of service.

Although Emma Cranstoun did not ask Lucy to come to her at the Hirst, yet she knew too thoroughly the characters of all at Bracken Braes to treat them with neglect or displeasure. Many kind inquiries still came, and Lucy had even received two or three letters, expressed almost with her former free affection. Lucy could not but look forward, in her hopeful nature, to being restored some day to the place she had left in her bosom, and beside her bed; and, "perhaps, even when the whole truth is brought to light, my conduct may be approved, and Mary Morrison forgiven." But the most alarming rumours respecting the lady's health were now prevalent over the whole parish. Mr Kennedy evidently spoke as if his fears were greatly increased; and Lucy often awoke in the middle of the night, shrieking out that the Lady of the Hirst was dying or dead. More than once, too, had she dreamed of recovery and reconcilement; and, on awaking, felt heaven, with all its ecstasy, changed in a moment into this mournful earth.

Unable to endure all this fear and all this love, Lucy resolved to go to the Hirst, and find entrance to that room which she had so often decked to please her mistress's eyes, and never in vain. She knew that her intrusion would cause no disturbance, and that, if turned away from the gate, her tears would drop to the ground in silence. No angry frown, she felt assured, would fall upon one who had so often sung, in Emma Cranstoun's hearing, hymns in praise of their God; and the gracious lady who had so often smiled upon her dutiful Lucy, and held her hand when together they knelt down in prayer—the daughter of a long line of illustrious ancestry, and the child of a peasant, whose forefathers had all been dwellers beneath straw roofs—such an one would remember their pleasant devotion, and, for the sake of their common hopes of heaven, perhaps not refuse once more to take her back to her bosom. "Then, too," thought Lucy, "I can judge for myself if there be any change on her cheek for better or worse; but hope I will never resign till I am forced to look at her grave!"

There was no unfilial disobedience in stealing away, one fine winter morning, with a hesitating hint that she was going to Ladyside, and directing her steps, as soon as she was out of sight, toward the Hirst. She soon found herself on one of those beautiful winding walks through the woods, where she had so often accompanied the lady farther and farther on into the solitude of the waterfalls. Winter had stripped the most of the trees, and the withered leaves rustled mournfully beneath her feet. But still there was sunshine; and, looking towards the hall, every window seemed on fire with its cheerful illumination. There she distinctly saw the plants at the window of the greenhouse; and they were bright, even at that distance, with a thousand blossoms. Nothing was there to hint of decay or death; and Lucy's heart leaped within her, in the belief that many happy years might yet be in store for Emma Cranstoun.

Fearful as if she had been doing a thing that was wrong, Lucy glided up the steps that connected the greenhouse with the southern lawn, and opened the door, which she had often unfolded to the beams of the morning sunshine. She wasted not a look—or, if she did, it was hurried and indistinct—on the plants she had tended and trained; but with a beating heart ventured into the room where Emma Cranstoun used to have her couch; and there indeed was the lady lying as before, but with half-shut eyes, that opened as the shadow fell on them; for Lucy's feet were without a sound. Lucy stood trembling in the smile of recognition, bright, beaming, and benign as it ever had been, and, to the heart now relieved from fear, even more perfectly beautiful in its forgiveness. "Come hither, my lovely and loving Lucy, come hither to my heart." And although nothing filled her outstretched arms, the soft white hand fell upon Lucy's head, that leaned upon the couch, as the grateful creature knelt down and sobbed in her happiness, too mournful to be endured.

Emma Cranstoun gave orders that no one, not even Mrs Ramsay, should disturb her; and listened with the deepest interest to Lucy's simple and innocent eloquence, when telling all she knew of the wickedness that had betrayed Mary Morrison. The power of truth was in every word, and Emma Cranstoun asked Lucy Forester's forgiveness. That request was something too overpoweringly affecting to a heart that looked up to her as to a superior being; and Lucy beseeched her to recall such words, for that it was impossible for her to do wrong, and that every one at Bracken Braes had all along said that, till Mary's character was cleared, no one from the family could ever dare to show their face at the Hirst. "But last night I had a foretaste of this happiness in a dream, and will henceforth believe that dreams are sent from heaven."

Lucy knew that her benefactress must not be allowed to speak much in her exhausted condition, and feared that she had sorely wearied her by exciting too many feelings for Mary Morrison. "Say not so, my Lucy, for you have placed my pillow so, that the most delightful rest is over my whole frame, and that voice of thine is the best of all restoratives." All apprehension of displeasure now wore away, and Lucy kept her seat by the side of the couch, or obeyed the lady's bidding at word or sign, in all the little arrangements about the room, with the same noiseless alacrity that she had learned long ago, when first her father had been stricken blind; and that made her indeed, in sober truth, a ministering angel at a sick-bed.

It was, however, impossible for Lucy not to see that the frame of her mistress was weaker and more emaciated than before, and that her voice had a fainter, almost a hollow sound. Alive as she was to hope in all sorrow, yet she never foolishly shut her eyes to the truth, merely because it was distressing; and the truth now too plainly was, that Emma Cranstoun was not so well as she had been a few weeks ago. Lucy, therefore, did not wait to be asked to remain at the Hirst, but implored permission. "If Mrs Ramsay dislikes me, and still objects, on Mary's account, to my being here, O send for Mr Kennedy, and ask his advice as to the propriety of your Lucy

being again allowed to be your servant. Perhaps Mrs Ramsay will not dislike or condemn it, if Mr Kennedy says it is not wrong. Then my cousin Martha is one of the best-hearted, most obliging girls that ever was known, and indeed is far more useful about the house than I am, do what I will. They will miss me now less than ever; and, oh! what a relief to poor Mary Morrison's heart to know that the Lady of the Hirst has taken me into her service once more, in spite of all that ever was said against her in her affliction and her innocence."

The snow was falling thickly, and the afternoon had become full of gusts—the tree-tops bending low, and their red leaves careering in eddies. Lucy wrote a letter with her own hand to her father; for she had always addressed him in her correspondence since she could write at all, telling, in a few words, that the Lady of the Hirst had forgiven them, even Mary Morrison herself; and although Mrs Ramsay's natural temper was not the best in the world, and her judgments not a little warped, yet her intentions were good, and before night she had brought herself to regard Lucy with not a little kindness. A good share of trouble, too, was about to be taken off her own hands; although, to do the good lady justice, she never grudged trouble, fond as she was of descanting on her meritorious services; and having the sincerest affection for Emma, who, without sacrificing any of her own independence, always treated the old lady with respect, she was even happy to think that there was now a young person whom Emma loved constantly with her; so that she gave orders, with a pleasant countenance, about Lucy's bed, that had been removed, but was now soon wheeled, with its pretty curtains, into its niche in the wall, and, to Emma's eye, gave the whole room an instant look of cheerfulness that already in some measure restored her heart.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

As soon as it was known that the Lady of the Hirst had restored Lucy Forester to her favour, and thereby declared her approbation of her father's conduct in the melancholy affair of Mary Morrison, that unfortunate creature's situation was regarded in a very different light by all the firesides in the parish. Innocence will be vindicated at last, and every heart that has been conscious of cruelty or injustice to a fellow-creature, is afterwards fain to make amends by additional tenderness and commiseration. Mary was not long of discerning a decided change in the expression of almost all countenances; and life, that had for some time been a burden, was not only lightened, but a stealing sense of happiness came over her worn-out heart, and her eyes were able once more, not only to endure, but to enjoy the sunshine.

Michael Forester did not proceed rashly in his determination to establish proofs of Mary's marriage with Mark Thornhill, but he allowed the truth gradually to be brought out almost of its own accord. One of the witnesses, he found, had gone beyond seas; but the other, a woman of indifferent character, he had traced to Edinburgh; and there was a certainty of his bringing the nefarious conspiracy to light, when the hand of Providence itself was stretched out in the cause of the innocent. Mark Thornhill was stopped short in his wickedness by a mortal fever, and, on his dying-bed, remorse urged him to a full confession. Mary Morrison he acknowledged to be his lawful wife; and in a few days afterwards she was a widow.

Released from ignominy and disgrace, Mary now yielded herself up to the deepest grief; for, in spite of all his merciless barbarity, she felt that she had still continued to love Mark Thornhill. His deathbed repentance, whatever others might think of its severity, was accepted of by her as far more than an atonement for all the sins he had committed against her peace; and had it pleased God to spare his life, she would have been willing to have been taken to his bosom, and to have shown how perfect could be the forgiveness of a Christian wife. The time surely once was when he had loved her, nor could anything ever efface from her remembrance the impressions of his tenderness to her in the first season of their love, when probably he designed no evil, and spoke the truth, when he said that he loved her for her modesty and her innocence. A dreadful change had indeed ensued; and she had become the victim of a wickedness that he himself had not known to be in his heart, till gradually it had risen up in greater and greater power, and driven him at last to the very verge of inexpiable crime. Mary Morrison had been taught, and truly taught, by the stern Calvinism of her own father, that the human heart is desperately wicked; and, now that her husband was dead, she judged him in the light of that awful doctrine, and saw in his miserable guilt that of fallen and corrupted nature. Above all other considerations, he had now been called to judgment; and she humbly hoped, not without many inevitable although perhaps unavailing prayers, that as great sinners as he may have been ransomed into the mercy of the Eternal.

But gracious nature would not suffer Mary to remain long utterly disconsolate. The calm of the grave—so very profound—soon began to inspire her with a congenial tranquillity; and the melancholy creature, not yet eighteen years of age, walked about the quiet retirement of Bracken Braes, in her widow's weeds, with a composure that promised a life of sufficient happiness to one so contented and resigned. Her early youth had suffered the sorrows that belong to advanced age; but although the light of joy had been sorely darkened, it was not for ever eclipsed, and might yet shine upon her steadily, if not brightly, at Ewebank, in her father's house, if that door was again to be opened to one who ought never to have been driven from its shelter.

Abraham Morrison had shown himself to be what everybody now

called an unnatural father. But had he been really so, and had God frowned at all times upon his grey head since that evening when he cursed his child away from the hut in which she had been born? In that dark and disturbed tumult of many passions, He who formed the heart may have seen what was hidden from human eye, for He alone judges aright, in His omniscience, the secrets that wring the souls of the children of men. That unforgiving father had not been altogether deserted in his childless hut. Many a thousand times in the darkness of midnight, or the worse darkness of the unvisited day, had every shadow of anger left his wrinkled face, and every feeling of anger flown far away from his heart.

Tossed had his exhausted frame been in such solitary seasons, like a bark upon the sea, when every living thing has left the wreck. Often and often had he risen up, like one walking in his sleep, and implored God to send him back his child; kissed the pillow on which her once innocent cheek had lain, and recalled every curse he had ever imprecated against her, with tenfold destruction on his own unhappy head. But then evil whisperings came close by his ear from every corner of the dark dwelling; fingers pointed at him scornfully; and the eyes of the whole congregation, as they sat in God's own house, turned upon him, the father of her who had sold herself to sin and to shame. In his half waking dreams there was a hissing as of serpents; and a handwriting on the lowly walls instigated him in his delirium to keep this outcast sinner under the pursuing vengeance of a father's ban. Then the long habits of an unindulgent, indeed an unforgiving spirit, strengthened the power of all these phantasms; and thus fighting against all the most sacred emotions and instincts, which were often victorious, and as often overcome, he had sunk into a sort of insanity, which is the more dreadful, because its victim believes himself to be obeying, not only the law of nature, but the command of a superior and inexorable power.

Michael Forester knew the character of Mary's father well, and had not forgotten the last parting scene at Ewebank. Therefore, after her complete vindication by the side of her husband's death-bed, he still advised her to remain with them at Bracken Braes till a fit time might come for reconciliation. Neighbours were told to step in upon Abraham now and then at Ewebank, and by their more free and cheerful manner of talking, to show that a change was taking place in the opinions of all respecting his daughter. Ere long, something like the full truth was revealed to him by successive glimpses; and Michael at last ventured to send a message to him by a person whom he greatly respected, that he would in a few days come over to Ewebank, and he trusted not to leave it till he had convinced his friend that Mary, who had surely been a wife, and was now a widow, ought to be taken back, without any upbraidings, into her father's house.

Michael Forester chose the Sabbath-day for this work of love and righteousness. Agnes and Isobel accompanied him to Ewebank; and they all three walked silently and solemnly into the room where Abraham was sitting, with the open Bible before him—and the old

pauper reading hers likewise, in a nook by herself — for a while unobservant of their entrance. Abraham, although too weak to walk to the kirk, even although his unhappy feelings had suffered him to do so, was decently clad in his Sabbath apparel, and, being prepared for a visit, received them with surprising fortitude. "I again ask a blessing upon this house," said Michael; and these few words were heard efficaciously in the silence. The aged attendant placed her spectacles in her Bible, and walked out of the hut. Then Abraham felt his conscience smite him like a death-knell, for the presence of those who had received his daughter into their house when her father would have driven her out even into the winter's snow, dispelled all those distempered thoughts by which he had blinded his moral understanding, and he knew that he had sinned against nature and against God. "My bairn will never forgive me, though meek Mary Morrison was aye the name she bore; for didna you see, Mr Forester —no, you saw it not, for the Almighty, who burned out your eyes with His lightning, saved them from that pollution; but your Lucy saw it; and I wish you all to hear me confess it with my wicked grey hairs in the dust: your Lucy beheld this hand, which yet may wither in the unquenched fire, smite my daughter as she knelt before me — ay, smite her on the temples, till, without one groan, she stretched herself out like a corpse upon this very floor." At these words Abraham Morrison laid down his head in the white ashes on the hearth, and sprinkled them over it, saying—"Is this remorse, is this repentance, or must I feed the worm that never dies, and for me shall my Saviour have in vain been nailed upon the tree?"

No one moved; but they suffered the passion of the contrite man to take its course. Then said Isobel—"Fear not, my friend, but that this Sabbath shall indeed be unto thee a day of rest. Even at this very hour is the psalm perhaps rising to the throne of God from the kirk of Ferns, in which, although for some time absent, you have been for many long years a worshipper. In that congregation you will yet sit with Mary at your side, happier than you have been for many hundred Sabbaths; nor, Abraham, is your daughter even now far distant from you—she and Lucy are on the hill-side, looking down upon the dwelling in which she long thought herself happy, and below whose roof, fain is she, with a loving heart, once more to return!"

Agnes had gone quietly out of the room when Abraham had given way to that fit of passion; and she now came back, but not unaccompanied; for Mary Morrison, in deep mourning, walked in with her and Lucy, and then advancing a few steps, stood before her father. There was no agitation on her countenance, for her soul was prepared for this meeting, and it had gone through such sorrows that it was now found equal to any trial. She came not to forgive, but to be forgiven; and in a calm low voice asked if her father would take back to his bosom his repentant child. Her face was quite pale, but also quite happy; it did not seem that she trembled; and as her father stood motionless, with his hands before his eyes, Mary walked up to him with wonderful composure, and, putting her

arms round his neck, kissed his cheek almost as placidly as if on returning home from an annual visit to a friend's house, and then leaned upon his breast, half supporting and half supported by him who had held her up in baptism, joyful in the smiles of his first-born.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The winter sometimes passes away as if that season of the year had been imperceptibly blended with the autumn and the spring, and from December to April the earth lies with little diminution of its cheerful character below the beautiful uncertain weather. In a pastoral country of hills, such months are especially pleasant. All the small rivulets are kept perpetually alive and transparent in their grassy or pebbly beds—the flocks feeding on the braes, repose white in the fitful sunshine, just as in the warmth of summer—and frequently the whole air is filled with insects sent up from the rushes or crevices of the rocks in their ephemeral festivals. If here and there in the clefts on the mountain-tops some patches of snow are seen, they serve only to make the faded verdure of the pastures below appear brighter. The little moorland birds are heard twittering long before Valentine's day; and the flocks of fieldfares are more shy than when in severe storms they alighted among the drifts, and could with difficulty find their food on the winter fallows. Then at the time of merry Christmas neighbours have to find their way to each other's houses by more circuitous paths, according to the position of the bridges; for no stream is frozen, and perhaps the low lands are flooded or full of pools, like the sea-shore at the flowing tide. The crowing cocks are distinctly heard in the calm from house to house to a great distance; and from the hill-side the shepherd can count a hundred wreaths of smoke, seemingly settled for hours together—so breathless is the atmosphere beneath the blue firmament and all its fleecy clouds.

Such had been the character of this open winter in the parish of Holylee; and not a homestead within all its bounds more enjoyed the temperate season, or looked more beautiful under its variable colourings, than Bracken Braes. Indeed, there had scarcely been a single day, since Lucy went to the Hirst, on which the family could not sit below the plane-tree. Its hard healthy buds seemed impatient for the full spring; while the lilacs and horse-chestnuts, all the way down the avenue, when tinged by the sunlight, were, in the early part of February, as far forward as they had sometimes been at the middle of March. The primroses showed themselves, as it seemed, almost before the glory of the last year's garden-flowers was forgotten; and the geraniums and myrtles were oftener left out on the sloping bank for hours together than they had ever been in any one's remembrance. There had even been blossoms on the fruit-

trees before the earliest bird had begun to build its nest; and that earliest bird was the thrush, that again hung its cradel in the Traveller's Joy, descending like often-altered drapery over the parlour window.

Michael and Agnes were without their Lucy, and yet they had never been more perfectly happy. Always on the Sabbaths she came into her father's seat in the kirk, and sometimes went with them to Bracken Braes—walking over to the Hirst before dark, or in the moonlight. The dear stranger thus continually restored her parents' hearts, and carried her real presence in upon the cherished image of her absent beauty. Every Sabbath Agnes and Isobel thought they discerned some new sweetness in her appearance or manner; as for Michael, he desired but to hear her voice, and was satisfied. Martha, in whose disposition envy or jealousy had no place, and who now felt that she owed every day new obligations to her uncle and aunt, was at no pains to conceal her admiration of her incomparable cousin, and knew that she could not more acceptably prove her gratitude.

But in no other house, for many miles round, had there been such a change for the better in all things as at Ewebank. It had not pleased Providence to grant to Mary Morrison, in early widowhood, the comfort that breathes from the cradle—for her baby died almost as soon as born; but Mary considered that affliction as part of the punishment of her disobedience. Herself deceived by her unhappy husband, she had been prevailed upon by him to deceive her father; and she had lived sorely to rue that clandestine and irregular marriage. Her father was now an altered man indeed—patient, even mild—and under the power of a pious penitence. The change had not been imposed upon him from without, and therefore liable to other change and relapse; but it had been worked out by his own spirit fighting with itself—the better part finally triumphant. Pride, stubbornness, and a wilful hardihood, had been his besetting sins; but now all these were gone, and Abraham Morrison was gentle as a child to her who had for so many years trembled at his frown, and loved him with a troubled heart. Besides, Abraham felt that he could not be a long liver; and every day seemed more and more anxious to make amends to Mary for all the evils which his former neglect or cruelty, far more than her own error, had brought upon her, in those very years which nature holds privileged from any rueful distress. Sometimes when the sunshine broke suddenly in upon them sitting by the fireside, or as she was going about her work, with the constant approval of her father, Mary, in spite of her great misfortunes, felt a strong spirit of happiness expanding her bosom, and she would start to hear her own voice humming some cheerful air, which perhaps she had warbled with Lucy Forester on the Gowan Green.

It was the general opinion over all the parish that Lucy Forester had saved the life of the Lady of the Hirst. Even the proud and stately Mrs Ramsay, who with difficulty could bring herself to see either merit, beauty, or virtue in any one of what she called plebeian

birth, had been drawn against her will into an affection for her, and treated Lucy with all the kindness that her peculiar manners would permit. Emma Cranstoun had, during the whole winter, been exactly in that precarious state in which any neglect, or even injudicious care, might have proved fatal, and in which even the silence of unaccompanied solitude might have insupportably weighed down her spirits to death. But Lucy was always with her, and that was enough, whether mute or speaking; her looks, motions, and words were all timed and measured and toned by the nicest observations that a naturally fine mind could make under the influence of affection; and not only no touch, but no breath even, was too rudely applied to the lady's frame, that, like the leaf of the sensitive plant, would have shrunk into a tremor at the slightest violence, during that illness in which the immortal soul may be stricken into anguish by a cloud darkening the day, or the leaves rustling against the window. From November till May, Emma Cranstoun had never left her room; but now the summer was again at hand, and in a few weeks she was to leave the Hirst, and seek new strength in the air of Italy. Mrs Ramsay was to take her for at least a year to Genoa, Florence, or Pisa: the Hirst was to lose its lady; and Lucy Forester to return to Bracken Braes.

Emma Cranstoun did not despair of herself; and although the idea of taking Lucy with her to Italy had certainly not only passed across her mind, but even taken possession of it, she knew that it would be impossible to do so without cruel injustice to her parents. Michael Forester was perfectly happy, no doubt, in his blindness, but then he could not live were Lucy away in a foreign country; while to Agnes, whose health was by no means strong, her departure would seem like death. The lady felt that Lucy had done all the duties to her that nature and religion could approve, and was ready, with even a hopeful cheerfulness, to embark on a voyage to that beautiful land, to which so many have sailed, to drop their bodies into a foreign grave.

It was a sad day among all the hills of Holylee and Ferns when Emma Cranstoun was to leave the Hirst. Never did June breathe a more beautiful summer than had been deepening the umbrage of these old woods, and clothing even their shadiest recesses with a profusion of wildflowers. The year was in its perfection, yet the Hirst was in one hour to be darkened. Emma Cranstoun had many friends to bid farewell to from the houses of all the gentry, far and near, who came that day to the Hirst, not on idle ceremony, but with sincerest sorrow, took Lucy, an hour before her departure, into that greenhouse, now filled with odorous balm and the brightness of a thousand intermingled blossoms, and, joining in a prayer which they had often before repeated together, they there separated in silence—Emma going to join her friends in the drawing-room, and Lucy to her father and mother, who were in the great hall.

The Lady of the Hirst soon appeared gliding down the wide staircase, and walked to her carriage through the midst of the whole tenantry. There was Michael Forester, with his head uncovered,

and Agnes weeping many tears; but Agnes was not the only one who wept, for there were orphans and widows in that crowd; and they who had no cause to shed tears from any afflictions in their own lot, could not withhold them when the young, the beautiful, the charitable, and the pious was seen taking her departure from the house of her forefathers to a foreign country, too probably never more to return.

CHAPTER XXXV.

In a few weeks Lucy received a letter from Emma Cranstoun, written on the eve of embarkation, in a hopeful spirit; and if she read it once, she did so a hundred times, in the room beside her parents, in her own small retreat beneath the plane-tree, up upon the hill-side, and on the Gowan Green, half-way to the Hirst, whose extensive woods were visible from that eminence. The handwriting was firmer, Lucy thought, than usual, and she inspected the form of every syllable, that she might guess the degree of strength possessed by the dear hand that traced the affectionate words. There were no melancholy fears or forebodings expressed; and Lucy, before even the Lady of the Hirst had perhaps left the shores of England, already anticipated her return in restored and established health. Letters too were coming occasionally from Ellesmere; not that Ruth Colinson, or any one of the whole family at the Vicarage, were shining or frequent correspondents; but once in the three months or so, a Westmoreland letter did arrive; and then the word "Kendal," imprinted with villanous post-office type, and ink more villanous still, across the superscription, always brought to Lucy's eyes a smile of cordial delight. The Colinsons never forgot Martha, but sent her all the news they could gather about the old people with whom she had lived, and all her humble acquaintances; and the sound of the familiar names of persons and places took her back again, in short dreams, to the wooded neighbourhood of Hawkshead, and its pretty lake of Esthwaite, illustrious alike for its pike, its perch, its plovers, and its poetry. For Mr Thomson, the bard of Saury, had sung Martha's departure to Scotland, which he described as an isle far off in the great seas, and remarkable, as it was indeed naturally to be expected, for the multitude and majesty of its Scottish pines.

Lucy and Martha were both out, at some distance from the house, when an elderly stranger, of very gentlemanly exterior, walked into the room, and courteously saluted Agnes and Michael. In a few minutes he told his name—the father of Edward Ellis. The manner of all present was in an instant changed from hospitable civility into the most respectful attention, and many were the inquiries about the health and happiness of the youth, who had so often cheered with his conversation and laughter the roof of Bracken

Braes. But it was soon somewhat painfully observed, even by the blind man, that Mr Ellis's tone was cold and constrained, and that he was far from meeting with sympathy their eager and heartfelt interrogations. "My son was at Rome when last I heard of him, and I believe he will remain in Italy at least another year, when probably he will visit Greece."

The chilling influence of Mr Ellis's manner and discourse soon froze Michael, Agnes, and Isobel into unaccustomed silence. But the mystery of such apparently uncalled-for superciliousness was soon explained. "Mr Forester, from anything I can hear from Mr Kennedy, you are an upright man, and may be confided in; and therefore, sir, I have taken the liberty of visiting you in your own house, which, perhaps, you may at present be thinking rather an intrusion; but the truth is, that—that I was some time ago made very uneasy about my son Edward—you will pardon, because you can understand a father's anxieties, Mr Forester—about my son Edward, Mr Forester, and your daughter—her name, I believe, is Lucy. Now that the ice is broken, Mr Forester, I may say, that the remotest chance of my son forming such a connection could not fail of being most distressing—most agonising; and I trust in God that you will deal openly and honourably with me, and declare if there be anything like an engagement—an engagement of marriage—for there is no use in reasoning the matter between those foolish children—foolish is the word I use, for, from your daughter's very tender age, I feel persuaded that there is no occasion for a term of severer reprehension."

Michael Forester was almost entirely unprepared for such a speech as this; for although assuredly, now and then, he had thought it very likely that Edward Ellis, in the full flow of youthful enthusiasm, might admire, even love his Lucy, yet, judging justly of that high-souled boy, he never had suffered the thought to give him one moment's serious uneasiness, well knowing that his daughter's innocence was as safe in her simplicity with Edward Ellis as if she had been his sister; and that any love that might subsist between young hearts, in such very different conditions of life, would be little more than that emotion of common humanity, which, where the mutual objects are worthy, may not only harmlessly, but happily unite in friendship those whom destiny must soon not only part, but keep for ever separated, except in slight and transient intercourse on the paths of life onwards even to the very grave. But there was something not only in Mr Ellis's words, but in the tone in which they were delivered, to which Michael Forester, poor man and blind as he was, had never been accustomed; and raising himself up with natural dignity in his chair, he said, with a gravity almost austere—"My daughter, sir, is little more than a child; but since such a word as marriage has indeed been coupled with the innocent's name, be assured, sir, that my Lucy would not leave her blind father's side, if I only put my hand upon her head—thus—not for all the rank and riches in the land, although poverty, want, disease, and death were in all their ghastliness on the floor of this house."

The language of Michael, on all occasions of any seriousness or importance, was perfectly that of a man of education—in nothing vulgar, and not ineloquent in its simple and straightforward phrase—at once clear and emphatic. Mr Ellis, who, although a good and honourable, was in intellect a very ordinary man, had not been prepared for such an interview, and felt the artificial authority of his mere rank giving way beneath the ascendancy of natural endowments. The erect and commanding frame of the blind man, composedly seated in his chair, with one hand upon his staff, as if about to raise himself up into a standing posture—his strongly-marked but far from harsh features, animated by sudden emotion beyond the calm of that habitual thoughtfulness which the loss of sight had induced—his manifest contentment with his lot, which, so surrounded as he was, indeed scarcely seemed one of great hardship—his pride, or some state of the soul of a more sacred character, in his dutiful and devoted child—the affecting solemnity of his motions and gestures, every one of which slightly betrayed a sense of his comparative helplessness and dear dependence on those to whom heaven's light was not denied—and along with all these, a deference which he seemed not unwilling to show towards one who, he had been informed, was greatly his superior in rank, as well as the courteous kindness which he owed to a guest below his own roof, and that guest the father of Edward Ellis—one and all of these things, separate or united, gave the stranger a sudden knowledge of something existing in lowly life of which he had never had any suspicion, and in presence of which he felt abashed, humbled, and changed in a moment from the arrogant and dictatorial superior into an inferior called upon not to teach, but to learn—not to command, but to obey. Mr Ellis, although confused and confounded, attempted to rally his spirits; and after a few words of commonplace compliment, said that his purse was at Mr Forester's service. Michael, although a poor man, was as independent in his circumstances as any man in all Scotland; and if ever he had been at all worldly-minded,—and perhaps all people of very energetic character, when toiling either in mind or body for the good of their family, are apt to become somewhat too much so,—he had long ceased to err in that direction; for blindness had made him something better than a philosopher, and he had found the golden mean in moderate desires and a cheerful faith. Michael did not even condescend to notice what Mr Ellis had now said; but he indulged an allowable pride in alluding to himself and his condition. "Do you think, Mr Ellis, that in poor men's huts the best natural affections do not reside in as great force and purity as in the dwellings of the rich or noble? Is not my Lucy as dear to me, and for the self-same reasons as your Edward is to his father—and a finer boy never stepped across a poor man's threshold? You have hopes—just hopes of your son—and may God in His goodness cause them all amply to be fulfilled. You act rightly in this matter. Your son must marry a wife in the same rank of life with himself—Lucy Forester is but the daughter of a peasant. These eyes of mine, sir, have not seen for upwards of five years; and the last time I beheld

my Lucy, she was a fairy of a thing, that still slept in her mother's bosom. But although beauty be but a fading, I do not say a worthless flower, and although I have better gifts to delight me in my Lucy than any beauty that ever shone on maiden's countenance, yet they say my daughter is like the mother that bore her—and there Agnes—there my wife sits before you, and judge for yourself if I would exchange my lot with that of any other man living, blind though my eyes be as the floor beneath your feet."

In the silence that succeeded this impassioned appeal, Lucy Forester came singing into the room, with her hair sportively wreathed with a garland of wildflowers, and on seeing the stranger, stood suddenly fixed with all her glowing beauty, in one of nature's most graceful attitudes, on the floor of the lowly hut. "Lucy, this is Mr Edward Ellis's father," said Aunt Isobel, anxious that the blush that already mantled over her brow, cheek, and eyes might conceal her emotion. Lucy dropt a curtsy, with her heart beating like a frightened bird in its cage, and had just strength to seat herself on the stool by her father's knee.

Her father put his hand upon her head, from which she had just released the garland of flowers that fell at her feet, letting all her rich golden ringlets flow unconfined, and requested Mr Ellis to speak, that, before a word was said to Lucy, he might judge for himself how she received the communication. But Mr Ellis was dazzled with the beauty of the peasant's daughter, and at the same time persuaded by its uncommon sweetness that she was altogether artless and innocent, his naturally kind and considerate character recovered itself from an unnecessary, if not an unworthy, fear, and he felt that it would be at once coarse and cruel even to allude to his son after what he had heard and now saw of all the inmates of Bracken Braes. All that he said or did was to put a letter from Edward into Lucy's hand, with a few words of kindness; and she, unable to endure the scene any longer, flew out into the open air, and, almost without knowing whither her steps were carrying her, followed the stream down — down to the linn, and the Howlet's Nest, where Edward had first learned to meet her by accident two summers ago; summers, alas! how swiftly flown, and never to be equalled in beauty and in delight, long as that sun should shine in heaven.

The waterfall was cheering the solitary dell with its foaming murmurs; but Lucy saw, heard it not, or, if she did, 'twas like something sounding and gleaming in an imperfect dream. She leant, sick and blind, against the ivy tree, and at last opened the letter, in which she felt she was to read something for ever fatal to her happiness. There were not many lines—and kind, perfectly kind they were—but still they were charged with meaning not to be misunderstood. Thenceforth Edward Ellis was to be nothing to her but a name, a thought, a shadow; and as for herself, never more would her image come before his eyes as he roamed over foreign lands, or sailed on the bosom of the wide sea. Lucy Forester wept in grief—love—perhaps anger—shall it be said—despair? She went to the edge of the pool, and, taking from her

bosom the keepsakes Edward had given her at the Hawkstane Spring, she dropped them, one by one, into the deep water—all, all but one, which would not leave her hand—the brooch which contained his dark glossy hair, with two names engraved upon it—"Edward to Lucy." She took out the hair—and then the dearest memorial of all sunk to the bottom of the linn. Now indeed the dream was broken, like a foam-bell upon the flowing waters. Not till this moment had she been completely undeceived. Yet there had been no deceit—no faithlessness—no falsehood. Ignorant of themselves, their present condition, and their future lot, had Edward and Lucy been in the joy of their mutual affection. He had first come to see the impossibility of their ever being more to one another than they had already been—and now Lucy saw the same truth with the same sad conviction. "Vain creature that I was, and void of all understanding, ever to dream for a single time in my sleep that Edward Ellis was, all his life long, to love Lucy Forester! And yet often, too often, have I dreamt it; and, lo! he has passed away from Holylee—from Bracken Braes—from the linn and the ivy tree—like a cloud; and I shall never see his bonny face again till my dying day!" But as the tears flowed, her thoughts grew less and less bitter. She now began to recall all the delightful traits of his character, and to her unselfish nature that meditation brought an alleviation of grief. How courteous had he ever been in the cottage!—how tenderly polite to her mother!—how more than respectful to her father!—how pleasant to Aunt Isobel! But all at once she tore herself away from the trysting-place, and said within her heart that she would never more venture to revisit it—for all its beauty, all its blessedness was gone, just as the indescribable brightness of some too heavenly dream, that is felt at the time to be but a dream, and long long after, when it returns in indistinct remembrance on the soul, sheds something of its yet unextinguished light over the dim and clouded and imperfect happiness of this waking world!

Lucy looked at Bracken Braes; but Edward Ellis's father might still be sitting there—and she dared not—could not again meet his face, even in the gloaming. So she sat down among the broom, and did not go home till the plane-tree was standing quite visible in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Long before Christmas, Lucy Forester was happy as a lark in heaven, that cares not for a few clouds, and often is heard singing when there is little or no sunshine. Idleness is the great bane both of virtue and happiness, but she was never idle; and putting at all times her whole heart and soul even into the most trifling occupations, there was literally no time for regret or repining at Bracken Braes. Perhaps it might have seemed to those persons who love to

indulge themselves in useless sorrows, that Lucy was a girl of no steadfast affections, since she could so easily get rid of all mournful remembrances about Edward Ellis. But how could human life proceed at all, except in despondency and care, if the heart of the innocent were for ever to retain its afflictions? Losses, troubles, and death invade every dwelling on earth; but there are few dwellings in which, nevertheless, there may not be contentment. Fleeting as human joys too often are, perhaps they are not more so than human griefs; and at all events, it can never be a duty to brood over recollections that enfeeble our fortitude, even although they may relate to the best and surest sympathies of nature.

But while all was cheerfulness at Bracken Braes, there were sorrows in a worthy neighbour's house, that greatly affected Michael Forester and his whole family. Their good friends, the Maynes at Ladyside, had for a considerable time past suffered the very sorest distress that can enter within the doors of a house. Isaac the scholar, the youth whose surprising genius had been the glory of the parish of Holylee, had missed his way in the world—the broad and shining way of truth and righteousness—and had brought himself to the very gates of death. Michael Forester had long suspected that his conduct had not been what might have been predicted of a boy so richly endowed with the gifts of nature. Jacob Mayne far seldomer spoke of his son than he had used to do, and never now with that pride which once kindled in his eyes at the slightest mention of his name. But truth could be concealed no longer—all Isaac's brightest prospects in life had been blasted by his own imprudence, follies, and vices, and he lay now in a hopeless condition within his father's house at Ladyside.

Who can estimate the blessings of education, when it comprehends within its range almost every dwelling in the land, and when all the most numerous families of the very poorest men, up even from the child of six years old to the grandsire of fourscore, can read, and in due measure understand the Word of God, and the written commentaries of man? From the humblest huts in such a country come sometimes forth in power the illuminators of the race; while all the ordinary ongoings of life partake of a loftier character among those who pass unknown to the grave, along the quiet paths that all end there as well as the paths of glory. Generations do not then disappear merely like the leaves, but theirs is an undying spirit that pervades future time, and invigorates the whole frame of social life, thus continually increasing in strength and beauty. But even this blessing is not without that alloy which mingles with all that is most excellent in man's estate. How many that might have been safe in their simplicity, employ knowledge to their own destruction! Feelings, in their origin pure and high, often catch in their progress a taint of corruption—imagination often dazzles to betray—and genius itself, the most envied gift of Heaven, has it not too often conducted to guilt, despair, and death!

So had it been with poor Isaac Mayne. In earliest boyhood, when sitting on the brae herding the sheep, to him had whisperings come

of a world of thought that lies for ever unknown to the ordinary peasant. He saw a beauty in every little wildflower, in the structure of every blade of grass glowing with its dew-drops, and in the drooping branches of the birch-trees, imaged peacefully in the unsullied water they overshadowed, which he bore within his spirit like an uncommunicated secret, a very burden of delight, which there was no one to share with him in his solitude. Unassisted by advice, and led, as it were, by some sacred instinct, Isaac, before he was twelve years old, had pored over many books, in which his own keen and bright genius enabled him to interpret the character, which, as his intellect expanded, all seemed as full of hidden meanings as hieroglyphics. Then the young enthusiast left his native hut, and walked into the bewildering world of thought. But as he became familiar with all those ideal regions, he was at the same time surrounded, tried, and tempted by wants, cares, desires, hopes, and passions, that spring from flesh and blood, course along the veins, and, all unwearied with their ceaseless journeyings, come and go from the beating or the boiling heart. Isaac, as he stood on the verge of manhood, felt that there was truth in the fiction, that man has indeed two souls. On the wings of the one he soared into regions so pure and high, that he seemed to float above this earth and all its bewildered scenery, like an eagle aloft in the stainless ether; but on the feet of the other, made of gold and clay, he walked through haunts where danger lures on in the shape of delight, till at last sin boldly meets her guest with undisguised lineaments, and stamps upon his very conscience, as with a searing-iron, the brand by which she at once recognises and claims all those who have sold themselves for the price of her irresistible allurements.

Yet it was long—very long—after his first great lapses, before such a youth as Isaac Mayne could be degraded by the permanent dominion of vulgar vices. The fineness of his native genius saved him from many pollutions to which coarse natures are prone. But no happiness of natural constitution can guard its possessor from worse and worse evils, when the eye of conscience has been darkened or shut, and when religion has evaporated into a mere imaginative feeling, or been narrowed into a cold conviction of the understanding. Therefore Isaac became at last little better than a vulgar sensualist: the disorder in his spirit disordered his whole life; his duties were either neglected or despised; his character, month after month, received a darker die; and not only conscious of what he now was, but aware of what he might have been, he finally flung from him the hope and the desire of restoration, and was willing, in the dawn of his youthful prime, to shut his eyes for ever on a world which had been spread in its beauty before him, only, as it now seemed, that he might disfigure and profane all its most holy charms, and carry with him to the grave the miserable remembrance of talents misemployed or thrown away, and of aspirations that once owned no other source than Heaven, sunk now to the level of the lowest creatures that crawl upon the earth.

What could his ignorant father, his simple-minded mother, and

his homely sisters now know of the sufferings of Isaac Mayne? They saw him for some weeks wandering like a ghost about the doors, and then taking to his bed in silence, refusing sustenance, and sullenly shunning all concern even with his parents. His were failings they could neither understand nor assuage. Their kindnesses were directed to things that, in Isaac's eyes, were now less than nothing; for what signified to him a smooth pillow, food or medicine brought, with weeping eyes and the tenderest hand, or the silencing of the wheel, and of every the least noise in that small house! Isaac cared not about his bed; for, spread it as his mother might, to him it was a bed of iron, and strewn with thorns; poison would to him have been more acceptable than any food; and there were sounds in his spirit that would not cease, louder and more alarming than the winter storm. Jacob knew not where to turn for comfort, seeing that his son's reason was impaired; but, next to Mr Kennedy, he looked for relief, if relief there could be, to Michael Forester.

Michael had sometimes, in his solitary meditations, thought that perhaps some day Isaac Mayne might make Lucy his wife. Many things must escape the knowledge of the most intelligent of the blind; and in this case Michael had been greatly deceived in the character of him whom he continued to esteem and admire, long after almost all others had begun to regard it with more than suspicion. He was even occasionally displeased with Lucy for her indifference or dislike to Isaac Mayne; and he hoped that, as she grew up, and saw more clearly and widely into her condition, that her heart might be changed, and favourably inclined towards one of whom he entertained so high an opinion. But Lucy had noticed many things in Isaac that turned her from him with feelings stronger than she wished to indulge towards any human being; for her eye, quick in her innocence, had seen that Isaac was an undutiful son, and treated both his father and mother with disrespect. Lucy had not been mistaken in these observations, for when once the soul of a man has stooped to any single meanness, another and another will not only work in of itself, but will be dragged over his whole conduct by the very circumstances of life. Isaac had become ashamed of his poor parents; and there were situations in which it is more than probable he would have disowned them because of their homely manners and appearance. The time had been when he was proud to walk to the kirk with his hard-working father, and to stand hand-in-hand with him in the little friendly ring of Christians at the door, before the bell began to tinkle, or Mr Kennedy appeared. But he had had the wretched weakness to attach a painful importance to the idle words that he had since occasionally heard in town talk about low birth, humble origin, plebeian blood, and so forth — expressions which are never heard from the lips of high-born men, but not unfamiliar to the mouths of the mean in nature or condition; and he had almost unconsciously allowed himself to form unwarranted associations of everything most worthy of being admired and imitated with a certain rank in life; so that it even pained him to

think on the low and thatch-roofed cabin, as it might be called, in which he was born and bred; and it would have brought the red colour into his face to have acknowledged in some companies his humble but honest origin. When he thought on his mother even, and all his sisters working in the harvest-field, or busy in the byre or the dairy, and then considered where he might then be sitting among ladies and gentlemen, into whose society his distinguished genius and talents had procured him a ready admission, and who, most assuredly—at least all of them whose good opinion was worth having—did not admire him the less because they indeed knew that he was the son of a peasant, Isaac Mayne had often felt foolishly humbled in his own estimation—so nearly allied are meanness and pride! What high satisfaction was thus lost to this youth's soul! For to have striven as he had done was indeed glorious; and his imagination, under the impulse and guidance of nobler principles and feelings, might have visited in its dreams the braes of Holylee as the only paradise on earth, and his father's lowly mansion at Ladyside as the very centre of that paradise, from which would have streamed a light that need never to have been darkened before the eyes of filial reverence.

Both Agnes and Lucy had once been witness to a scene in the churchyard of Holylee, at the close of Divine service, after which neither of them had been able to regard Isaac Mayne with their former affection. Several ladies and gentlemen, who had been sitting in the seat of the Lady of the Hirst, in the little gallery, addressed Isaac on the dismissal of the congregation, when he was along with his parents and sisters. They had known him in Edinburgh as a young man of genius, and were not aware that Holylee was his native parish. Isaac had then, under manifest uneasiness, separated himself from the decent home-group, of whom no man need have been ashamed; and to an inquiry from one of the party, who were the friends he had just left, his answer was vague, and implying that his father, mother, and sisters might be to him almost strangers. Lucy could not help eyeing him with anger and disdain, while she thought for a moment of Edward Ellis; and then, going up to her blind father, walked with him through the crowd, in a pride known to herself alone, but in a beauty that attracted the gaze of all the strangers, who at once said to Emma Cranstoun, "There is no need to tell her name—your description, partial as it was, did not exceed the truth; she is indeed the Primrose of Bracken Braes."

But all such remembrances were now dismissed from their minds; and Agnes and Lucy, no less than Michael, thought only on the fair side of Isaac's character. They went almost every forenoon to Ladyside; and Isaac, who day after day had become more indifferent to everything about him, and almost wholly unobservant, asked if he could see Lucy Forester. His mother took Lucy to his bedside; and Isaac's eyes for a few moments recovered their fine intelligent expression as they were lifted up towards her pale and weeping countenance. "God bless Lucy Forester!" said the dying youth; and

his mother afterwards often assured Agnes that these were his last words; yet Isaac lived on for two or three weeks without pain, but insensible to the world. The old shepherd-dog, that had been fourteen years in the family, leapt up on his bed; but Isaac felt no disturbance. Had the flail been sounding in the near barn, it would have been unheard. "My poor son, Mr Forester," said Jacob, in a calm voice, "has for nearly a week been past hearing our evening psalm."—"I am happy to know that you are so resigned, Jacob—your wife and daughters, too, are, I think, composed."—"Ay, ay—we have, in a manner, taken farewell of Isaac—for you see his mind is gone; but his soul has not yet been called away, and I will not give him the last kiss till he is dead." There was no one else in the room at this time but the two fathers; and Jacob Mayne, whose usual state of mind towards Michael Forester was that of reverence, now embraced him in a sudden burst of agony, and cried with a loud voice, "Pity me, pray for me—for Isaac—my darling Isaac—the life, and the light, and the pride of this house—will never know his father's voice more!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LADYSIDE was at all times rather a melancholy-looking place, standing, as it did, at the very remotest end of the valley of the Heriot Water—there an insignificant rivulet, and at a considerable distance from any other habitation. The high heather-hills overshadowed it; but there were no trees—for the decayed and mossy stumps of a decayed forest could not be called trees; and Jacob Mayne had never been very well able, with his narrow means, even if he had thought of it, to make any plantations, either for ornament, or shelter to his cattle. Its mournful character was deepened on the day of Isaac's funeral, which was on one of those dim and silent forenoons that in early spring breathe a pensiveness over the air and the earth. No bleat of lambs was yet heard over the braes—the birds had not begun their carols—and the perfect silence was broken only by the sound of feet, as friend and neighbour, one after the other, at short intervals, were coming in to the funeral.

The company assembled in the kitchen—a wide, low-roofed room, with an ample chimney—in the corner of which, below the smoke-stained beam, Isaac Mayne had sat during many a long winter evening, conning over his book, to the delight of his proud father's heart, undisturbed in his studies by the noise of work or merriment. Mrs Mayne had herself, with the assistance of Agnes, arranged all the seats that very morning; and everything was decent and orderly about the room. Many an intelligent and thoughtful countenance—not a few of them with their foreheads sprinkled with grey hairs—were seen in that circle. Some wine and funeral bread were handed round, and partaken of by all, after a prayer from Mr

Kennedy; and then, going into the open air, the company formed themselves behind the coffin, which had been placed on the green before the door, and the procession moved down the valley.

Isaac's mother and sisters had, during the prayer, taken farewell, on the green, of his mortal part, standing together with Agnes and Lucy; and as soon as the party left the door, weeping eyes followed it from the window in the thatch, down the stream, till, round a small mount, it disappeared.

The funeral company was a large one, for the Maynes were respected in the parish; and as for Isaac, his fame had spread far beyond its narrow bounds; and now that he had expiated, even by death, whatever faults he had committed, the grief that went with him to the grave was profound and universal. Many people who could not be invited to the funeral, nevertheless came into the churchyard, and all clothed in mourning. The children of the village school were drawn up in a line near the grave, and the low walls that enclosed that quiet place of burial were almost entirely covered with spectators—few of them indifferent to the solemn scene. Michael Forester, who, next to the father of the deceased, was chief mourner, stood close beside him when the coffin was lowered down, and grasped Jacob's hand when the first shovelful of earth said, without man's words, "Dust to dust."

The silent party dissolved, and in an hour or two most of them who had composed it went to their work in the fields. Michael went back with Jacob Mayne to Ladyside, and early in the afternoon the whole family sat down to their meal. There were not a great many tears, and such as fell at times were not very bitter; for every heart had had time to prepare itself for weeks before Isaac's death; and now that his remains were given up to invisible decay, a calm came down from heaven upon the house—and life, although it had lost much, still had to them its blessings.

"Mr Forester," said Jacob, "many great kindnesses have we received at your hands, but this last is the greatest of them all: religion itself has been a mair unspeakable comfort to us all on this occasion because of your Christian charity to the afflicted; and poor Isaac's mother there, last night, when sairly distressed, and calling on God to comfort her, mentioned your name, and your wife's and daughter's, in her prayers. She is, as you know, a woman of few words; but there naewhere lives ane wi' a mair grateful heart." Jacob then turned his eyes towards a little bookcase that hung on the wall by a string fastened to a nail, and said—"That was the wark o' Isaac's ain hands, before he was ten years old. Many and many an hour have I seen him at it; and an ingenious thing it is for so young a creature. These volumes were the first he ever bought—wi' his ain money, too; for we were very poor in those days, as ye ken, and Isaac was most industrious." But here Jacob's voice was mute, and he walked out into the open air. Michael joined him there; and by the long conversation that ensued concerning Isaac the father's heart was quieted, and believed that his son's spirit was now happy in heaven.

Leaving the family at Ladyside composed and resigned, Michael, Agnes, and Lucy returned beneath the stars to Bracken Braes. Lucy scarcely opened her lips; for she thought of Isaac's very last words, and knew, now that his heart was still in the dust, how much dearer she had been to it than she had ever believed. His many good qualities well deserved her tears, and the remembrance of the happy hours she had long ago passed with him and his sisters, when every one loved and admired him; but the thought that she had been dearer to him than even his own nearest kin, and that his affection for her was the last thing to leave his soul on the bed of death, touched her with an almost self-upbraiding sorrow, and gave his memory a hold on her secret bosom, from which she felt nothing could ever displace it.

While they were all sitting round the fire, and just as the clock, striking ten, told them to retire to rest, the door opened, and in came Mary Morrison. "Pity me!" cried Aunt Isobel, "what brings you here so late at night; tell us—are you all well at Ewebank?" Mary sat down on the seat that Lucy's ready hand had placed for her, and said, calmly, "My dear father is dead!—perhaps I should not have left him; but there was nobody in the house with me; and when it became quite dark—for the fire had gone out—I was not able to abide the dreadful stillness, and have come here." The key of the hut was yet in her hand, which she had carried in it, unconsciously, all the way from Ewebank.

Abraham Morrison's death had been sudden; but every circumstance attending his latter days had been such as now to comfort his daughter. Their reconcilement had been perfect; and the last year of the old man's life, blameless and Christian-like, had prepared him for this change. Mary had been already acquainted with grief, and now sat in her cloak, beneath which she still wore her widow's weeds, unagitated by any strong emotion, like one having come from a neighbour's house on some grave but not grievous errand. She had come, too, at a time when all her friends were, from the melancholy duty in which they had been engaged during the day, in a state of mind altogether congenial with her own; and in another hour Mary was lying, as she had often done before, in Lucy's bosom.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

What strong support does the consciousness of a good reputation yield to all men in the discharge of their most arduous duties, and how benignly does a regard to the opinions of those among whom we live blend almost into one motive with that which we observe towards the injunctions of our Maker! Michael Forester knew that he was esteemed—beloved by every family in Holylee; and

although he had in no one single instance ever tried to become the object of such sentiments, by any unworthy submission or compromise, yet he rejoiced to know their existence, and felt them to be, in part, both the impulse and reward of virtue. Above all, his character as a peace-maker was especially dear to his heart and conscience; and nothing cheered his blindness more than the humble trust, that, in administering comfort to human misery, which it had not unfrequently fallen to his lot to do, he had been obeying the precept of Him whose prime commandment was, that we should love one another. Michael had often thought that, had he still possessed his eyesight, he might have been more selfish, more exclusively devoted to the temporal interest of his own family, and more lukewarm in the interest of his Heavenly Master. He attributed no merit to himself in any kind action which he had been enabled to perform; but his conscience rewarded him by the most delightful of all feelings—gratitude to God.

There were now two orphans living under his roof—his own brother Abel's Martha, and Mary Morrison. Never were any two creatures more different; yet they were equally grateful, and in a month or two after Abraham Morrison's death, it might almost have been said equally happy. Martha had never known much deep heart-grief, but then she had endured toil, trouble, hardship, and neglect, during the worst years of her life; and during the best, her happiness had sprung up of itself, whatever it might have been, against not a few depressing circumstances, of which the misery had been felt, although overcome. Since she came to Bracken Braes, no one could be more content and cheerful, showing her enjoyment of life, not by any starts of delight or sallies of glee, but by a perpetual vivacity that kept her stirring from morning to night in solitary occupations, which, whether easy or laborious, seemed alike sources of the liveliest satisfaction. Martha was now quite a Scotch girl—an epithet which she had borne in Ellesmere, without any very good title to what was so respectable; yet still something of the Westmoreland dialect blended with the Doric of the Selkirk braes, and at times recalled pleasant remembrances of the distant Vicarage. The first time that Michael stood beside his brother Abel's grave, with Martha by his side, who read the letters on the stone rather with a grave curiosity than any mournful emotion—for what more could they well be to her but mere chiselled characters?—his heart travelled back to the garden at Dovenest, and into another world of pleasant years, that seemed almost as much apart from that in which he now lived, as two separate states of existence! He thought too of his father's love for Abel, and his conscience told him that he had not forgotten the old man's dying words. Such remembrances might not now, after so many years, be very frequent; but they never recurred without refreshing his whole moral being, and deepening his contentment, his gratitude, and his faith.

Towards Mary Morrison, the feelings of the whole family, if not of a more affectionate, were of a deeper kind. But for them she might have been wholly lost; and the gradual revival of her dis-

consolate, and once almost broken heart, was a daily delight to them all; but far beyond others, to Lucy. There was nothing approaching to jealousy in Martha's mind towards Mary; on the contrary, that warm-hearted girl always behaved to her with a thoughtful tenderness, which made Lucy love her cousin more than she had ever done before, and anxious to show her at all times that there was no preference of Mary Morrison in anything that could wound either pride or affection. Martha was certainly inferior to them both in fineness, and tenderness, and depth of character; but still they had no feelings in which she could not, in her own way and measure, sympathise; and she sometimes won upon their very closest affection by unexpected and casual glimpses of sensibilities that her ordinary deportment did not display, but which yet slumbered in her nature, and were fated, at no very distant time, to be called into play in the more difficult duties of mature life.

As for the Maynes, it is wonderful how happy they all were at Ladyside. Jacob's eldest daughter had been requested in marriage by one of the most respectable young men in the whole parish, the only son of a considerable heritor; and this event, independent of its natural interest to a father's heart, relieved his too anxious and foreboding mind from all the worst fears about his family in case of his own death.

Isaac had cost his father much money—such now were Jacob's own words, when speaking of his dead son, to his very intimate friends, and without the remotest meaning of censure—so that it was generally supposed that there was a heavy mortgage on the property formerly belonging to Richard Mayne. Such thoughts—very natural, and not at all reprehensible—came to Jacob's mind, along with the influence of time, and the operation of many other better reflections, till, by midsummer, a stranger going in to Ladyside might have remained there a whole day without seeing or hearing anything to make him suspect that, a few months ago, death had taken away him who had been the pride of the whole house.

It was again midsummer, and no less than two whole years had revolved since Lucy had set out at midnight, under the guidance of Edward Ellis, for Ellesmere. These two years had brought her to woman's estate; and now, in her seventeenth June, perhaps her friends at the Vicarage, were they to see her now, would scarcely know her to be the same maiden that came so suddenly upon them, on that day of rain and thunder, weeping and sobbing on account of her dying mother. These friends had not forgotten her, and the hour had come when Ruth Colinson and her brother Miles were indeed at Bracken Braes.

Beautifully prepared for their arrival was the avenue, the green, the garden, and the cottage. Agnes and Lucy remembered the exquisite neatness of everything in and about the English Vicarage, and almost despaired of equalling what seemed to be peculiar to the character of that country. There was a richness, too, of verdure and bloom at Ellesmere, with which nothing in their own poor pastoral part of Scotland could pretend to vie; and coming from all

those woods and groves, sounding with their open or hidden waterfalls, what could the Colinsons think of their lone valley, and the Heriot Water wimpling along the open pastures? But these thoughts had been only half sincere; and as the sun rose on one of the fairest mornings that the summer had brought, Lucy eyed the place with pride, and was glad that their friends from England were to arrive at Bracken Braes during such heavenly weather. In the cool of the evening before, all the shrubberies had been watered; a slight sprinkling of bright blue gravel from the burn had given a spirit of liveliness to the avenue and all the plants through which it winded along; and it seemed as if every bee in the parish were in the plane-tree, so loud and yet so lulling was the sound in that umbrageous tent.

Ruth and her brother had been true to the very hour; and never had there been a happier meeting than now befell in front of that cottage. Martha was no insignificant personage on this occasion; and for a short time Lucy left all the questions to her, preserving all her own kindest whisperings to Ruth for the shadows of the evening.

This visit awoke in the hearts of Michael and Agnes the most distressing and the most delightful remembrances belonging to their whole life; and while Lucy accompanied Ruth and Miles all about the braes, and not unfrequently to the Hirst—the only old place worth seeing to strangers—they remained at home conversing about the Vicarage, and the mercy shown to them by their Maker in that crisis. But, after the first week, Michael also took his staff, and made one of the party on many of their excursions; and on all such walks Lucy more and more regarded Miles Colinson with esteem and affection, for then he showed himself forth in converse with her father; and his were talents strong by nature, and nobly endowed by sciences in which there is no deception, and that give a simple and unostentatious character to the whole mind of him by whom they are successfully pursued. How superior seemed to Lucy the calm settled knowledge of such a mind as that of Miles Colinson, to the wild and disturbed eccentricities which, with all his feeling and genius, had fatally characterised that of Isaac Mayne! This knowledge was clearly in alliance with virtue. Here, heart and mind were almost different words for the same thing; and Lucy, when Miles was speaking to her father on such subjects as she could understand, did not so much think about his abilities as his dispositions; for a certain considerate sweetness of sentiment imbued all he said with the common spirit of humanity. Yet was Miles Colinson fit to be compared, in her imagination, with Edward Ellis, the graceful and elegant and beautiful boy that had once laid himself down, and watched over her, while she slept by that mossy well in the desert, with no other living thing near them but the moorland birds, and the bees murmuring through her dreams among the flowers and heather-bells of the solitary mountains? But that was a childish vision, and never again could it find an abiding place within a bosom not yet indeed depressed, but still somewhat hushed

by the almost unconscious influence of the shadows of time stealing upon her altered being! The past, while it rose up before her, now always possessed the character of a dream, and, like a dream, stood apart by itself from the realities of the living world. Such dreams visit every human heart—sometimes, perhaps, sickening it by the contrast, yet oftener inspiring gratitude; for, in all their beauty, what are they but the golden mist that shrouds all objects in undistinguishable delight, and veils from youthful eyes the real shapes and lineaments of nature.

Besides, Lucy's whole mind was now woman grown; and all the relations of life had been, oftener than she knew, meditated upon by her with their delights and duties. The conversations that took place every evening by the fireside, when all were sitting together, were often of a light, but never of a trifling nature. Pure were all Lucy's thoughts as the well in which she dipped her pitcher, but they were familiar with all sacred household words; and as she beheld herself in her mirror, which, close to the window of her bedroom, reflected not only her face and figure, but all the flowering richness of the avenue, and the beauty of the broomy braes, she would sometimes slowly retire, and then as slowly return in her rejoicing beauty, like a bride on her wedding morn; and, it may be, wondering, in a transient thought, if it were impossible that she could be now beloved by Miles Colinson, as she had once been by one far away over the roaring seas.

Poor Mary Morrison, the blossoms of whose early affections had been so soon dismally blighted, thought now of nothing else than Lucy and Mr Colinson. Could she see Lucy married to such a man, then would all her own cares be forgotten. The sight of such pure, calm, thoughtful, and profound affection as was dawning upon her eyes sometimes almost made her weep; for although her conscience had not much to reproach her with in her unhappy love for Mark Thornhill, how different had been his wooing from this! How uncertain and how troubled—how cruel in its close—and then what distraction on that bed of death! Theirs were the first gentle beginnings of mutual faith—of love almost before the hearts in which they were arising knew with what kind of delight it was that they were so sweetly stirred. There were truth, simplicity, honour, and religion, all united in one holy purpose, and yet that purpose scarcely known to those bosoms of which, nevertheless, it shaped and coloured all the very lightest and the very gravest thoughts. "In former days, sometimes when sitting by ourselves on the sunny braes, I have said to Lucy that I would be her bridesmaid: some far happier creature than me must now stand in that place; but perhaps I may be allowed to go with Lucy Colinson to Ellesmere; and methinks these hands o' mine could better than ony ither but her ain put up her bonny hair, and adorn her like a lily on her wedding-day. No black must be worn on that holy morning of sadness and joy; and I will lay aside my weeds for one day, returning to them again by the next sun, for they are tokens of my affection for him who is gone, and also of my sin and repentance."

But what did Miles Colinson think of Lucy Forester? He could not forget the hour when first he saw Ruth wringing out the rain from her ringlets, as she stood among them in the Vicarage, beseeching them to say if her mother was indeed alive. But now those ringlets, although they had lost something of that sunny glow which the tempest could not tame with all its deluge, were far more lovely than ever, in the subdued and tender light that shone over her thoughtful forehead. Then she had been accustomed to gaze on everything she beheld, with the almost instinctive delight of childhood; but now Lucy understood more of the meanings on the face of nature, and looked over the heaven and the earth with a spirit of piety that felt God to be there, even while all her thoughts were about her fellow-creatures and their habitations. Even when Lucy spoke of that festival on Windermere, which at the time had seemed to be more like a glorious train of sights passing in the trance of a fairy dream, than a scene transacting on the bosom and the banks of a real lake, it was with a calm and almost melancholy voice; for was she ever again to behold those clouds, and woods, and waterfalls, shadowed far down within the depths of that mirror, over whose surface not an air breathed to veil with dim suffusion the reflected scenery of earth and heaven? "Am I ever again to be at Ellesmere?" thought Lucy; and the same thought, more eager, ardent, impassioned, and overwhelming, was in the heart of him to whom Lucy was every hour becoming dearer and more dear, till even the very sense of her surpassing beauty was lost in a love that lived upon her whole delightful character, and could never die away while life lasted, even if that beauty were to be utterly extinguished; for still the maiden at his side would be Lucy Forester, and none but she was ever to be cherished in his heart, whether it had been already doomed that she was thenceforth to be to him but a shadow, or a steady light that might shine on him for ever.

It was not possible that Miles Colinson's growing attachment to Lucy could escape the notice of any one of those most interested in her welfare; and Michael and Agnes, happy as they would both be beyond their imagination of happiness were their daughter to become the wife of such a man, almost wished that he were gone from Bracken Braes. They did not know whether such a connection—and yet, perhaps, the very forethought was altogether but an idle dream—might be agreeable to the worthy vicar. The visit had merely been one of a friendly return; and such consequences as now seemed far from improbable, could never have entered into the minds of Mr Colinson's parents when he and Ruth left Ellesmere. There almost seemed, to the high and independent mind of Michael Forester, something clandestine, or at least not perfectly open, in thus allowing the affection of the guest below his roof to grow into a deeply-rooted attachment for his own daughter, without being perfectly certain that such an attachment would be approved by those who were not indeed privileged to dispose of their son's feelings, but certainly to guide them, and to be consulted in their final decision. Agnes felt the same difficulty and delicacy in this situation;

but Aunt Isobel considered the subject in a very different light. "What's the use, children, o' making yourselves unhappy about what is one day to be the greatest blessing that ever shone upon us frae heaven, either at Dovenest or Bracken Braes? My troth, there is nae occasion to pity the folk at the Vicarage. A grand vicar apostolic o' the Episcopalian Church the young man's father maun indeed be, if Lucy Forester be not worthy of marrying into his family! For my ain part, I like the lad, God forgie me, very near as well as Mr Ellis himself—and he was a boy o' many thousand; but will anybody tell me that he deserves our Lucy? And yet he loves her well—that I can see, dim and auld as are my een noo—and will love her better and better as lang as he lives; for he has a strong thoughtfu' heart, that young Mr Colinson, and gin I am no sair mistaen, a clear conscience; and when such a one loveth a maiden, it is not for her face, or her een, or her breast, although that maiden be our bonny Lucy hersel, but for something that endureth and fadeth not away, the soul within us being immortal."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Thirty long days, certainly in general the finest of all the year in Scotland, from the middle of June to the middle of July, had floated away down the sky since Ruth and Miles Colinson had first found themselves domesticated at Bracken Braes. Scarcely during all that time had there been a dim forenoon, or any other than golden sunsets. Such weather may be objected to on account of sameness, and deficiency in picturesque and poetical effects; but it gives ample scope of time to hill-wanderers, and their walks of discovery between morn and eve, unimpeded by swollen rivulet or dripping fern—can embrace vale after vale—glen after glen—secret chasm known but to natives—wide moors not without a spirit of lonesome beauty—lochs miles asunder—and the cataract far up among the mountains—the boundary, indeed, of the journey, and beneath whose overshadowing birches, within reach of the dewy spray, the pilgrims may find shelter from the mid-day heat, and spread their table in the peaceful wilderness.

But the last evening they were to pass at Bracken Braes was now about to descend; and although there was no reason for melancholy, a pleasant pensiveness seemed deepening below the shadow of the plane-tree. Ruth and Miles had taken farewell of the few families in whose houses they had familiarly sat, especially those at Raeshaw, Ladyside, and the Manse; so there was nothing more to do in the view of their departure. Lucy, Ruth, Mary Morrison, and Martha, walked down the Heriot Water in that uncertain and unconcerned state of mind as to their movements, that every one feels when affected by mingled pleasure and pain. Miles Colinson was

glad to see the group tripping across the bridge of the Whin-holms; for he was desirous of being alone for an hour with Michael and Agnes, nor did he care if Aunt Isobel were also to hear his confessions.

There was but little chance of any visitor coming to Bracken Braes at that hour of the evening; but Miles Colinson thought neither the parlour nor the plane sufficiently safe from interruption, so he requested his friends to walk with him a little way up the hill behind the house, in among the hazels, hollies, and yews, where there were several little glades, as perfectly retired, within a hundred yards of the porch, as if they had been in the heart of a forest. In one of these they took their seats on the limb of an old disinterred tree; and while one and all suspected what might be the nature of the communication, yet not one of them would have been surprised had Miles Colinson introduced quite another subject.

Miles at once declared, with earnestness but composure—for he felt too profoundly to be visibly agitated—that he loved Lucy, and hoped that, if he were so happy as to gain her affections, her parents would give their consent to the marriage. He acknowledged that as yet he had no reason to believe that her regard for him was at all of the nature of love, and that, indeed, the idea of her extreme youth had often so influenced his behaviour towards her, that he was aware she could now only think of him as an elder brother. He felt that he owed it to Lucy's simplicity and innocence, to the parental kindness with which he had been received at Bracken Braes, and to the character and condition of Mr Forester—for now, for the first time in his life, he alluded to Michael's blindness—to the remembrance of all that happened when they were at the Vicarage, and to his own father and mother, to confess in this manner the state of his affections, before he even endeavoured to win Lucy's heart. "I dare not now speak to your daughter of love or marriage, Mr Forester; for were Lucy to hear me with averted eyes, methinks I could not bear to live; but all I beseech of you is leave to hope, that if, in future months or years, Lucy should give me her affections, you will not dislike me for a son-in-law."

Both Michael and Agnes, when Miles Colinson had ceased speaking, thought of themselves, and that sweet spring Sabbath, more than seventeen years ago, when, in the gardens of Dovenest, they found that a few words had betrothed them, and that a new light, fairer than ever they had beheld before, was stealing over the woods of Dryden. Agnes was now sitting by Michael's side, and laid her hand in sudden happiness upon his, which was not slow to return its pressure. "If I live," said Michael, "to see the day on which you will call Lucy your wife, this world will be almost too happy for her blind father!" The fine and delicate spirit of Agnes had felt unspeakable delight in the reverence with which Mr Colinson had behaved to her husband, and the exquisite tenderness he had shown towards Lucy's youth and innocence. This was indeed love—love such as she had herself enjoyed for so many years—uninterrupted—unimpaired—indestructible in its sanctity and in the preserving

spirit of human joy, that but for love would fall—die—and be buried like the flowers of the senseless earth.

Isobel alone stood up, and, her eyes shining with a lustre like that of youth, looked towards the setting sun. "I see long years of happiness preparing for them by that hand which is over all His works. Yes, I have seen my Agnes the happiest of the happy—as she is, and ever was, the best of the good; and now, lo! her Maker hath also blessed my Lucy, and her life and her latter end shall be peace."

But now voices were heard below, and Lucy's was among them; and, from the deadened sound, it was plain the party had sat down beneath the plane-tree. Although but few words had been uttered by those assembled in that glade, yet a weight of solemn and sacred meaning had lain upon their language. Miles Colinson, without any pain, was willing to obey the injunctions of Lucy's parents, not to address her till the following summer, having been assured by them that there was no danger of her heart yielding to any other attachment. From their affectionate prayers for his welfare, he felt that in his absence they would not only prevent his image from fading altogether away from Lucy's heart, but would hold it always before her in the most favourable and endearing light. In that hopeful state of mind, he began to dwell upon little circumstances that had occurred between him and Lucy, that seemed now, although they were too indefinite even to be named, to be not wholly insignificant; and, indeed, had he not been, although aware of his own moral worth and intellectual acquirements, a more than usually modest person respecting any power over the female heart—a power which he had never before thought of very seriously exerting—he might have believed, without any very great mistake, that Lucy's eyes regarded him with a pleasure that, although not what could be called love, was something, at her tender age, far better—from which would, in due time, be made to spring "that consummate flower," which can only unfold to perfect beauty in the light of matured reason.

Certainly that evening, although the last, was the happiest that Miles Colinson had passed at Bracken Braes. Lucy, altogether unconscious of being not only the object of all his love, but, as it might be said, affianced to him by parents who feared not but that her affections would soon glide into his bosom, sat with her arm round Ruth's neck, and gave her, over and over again, the kindest messages to her father and mother, independently of a long letter, which she had written something in the form of a journal. Miles had made many pencil-sketches of the scenery of Holylee, which Lucy had never before thought so beautiful in reality, much as she loved it all, and he asked her to keep them for his sake. Lucy promised to do so without a blush, but with the most benign eyes; and, with Miles leaning over her, arranged, according to her own liking, the small green nooks with a few sheep, or two or three cattle feeding, or standing below a rock—a little broomy oasis in the blackness of a Scottish moor—a waterfall—ay, even the linn of the Howlet's Nest closed in by gentle braes, in its sylvan loneliness, from all but the

silent sky—a glade in the Hirst woods, selected by Lucy herself, because one of the favourite haunts of Emma Cranstoun. These, and many more, she promised, as she was asked, to keep for his sake; nor did she conceal her joy at the thought of visiting Ellesmere, which Michael said was not impossible next summer—unless, indeed, the vicar and Mrs Colinson would come to them at Bracken Braes. "The Lady of the Hirst," said Lucy, "will be coming home next summer; for by the blessing of God her health is now perfectly restored by the air of those sweet foreign lands—and I must not be away when she returns." But Miles Colinson, from her affectionate looks when she was thus thinking of Ellesmere, drew the most delightful hopes, and said, with a smile, "that for the future they would all trust in Providence." Lucy had shown some of Emma Cranstoun's letters, first to Ruth and then to her brother, for they contained no secrets that might not be heard by any friend she had; and Miles Colinson could not but be still prouder of his Lucy—for to himself he had sometimes dared to call her so, when the sunshine danced into his heart—on thinking how highly that accomplished lady estimated her character, and how tenderly she admitted her into her friendship.

Early next morning a parting took place, without a tear, beneath the plane-tree; and as long as Ruth and her brother were visible, many a farewell was wafted to them down the vale, by hand and kerchief—many a prayer sent after them when they had disappeared.

CHAPTER XL.

The harvest in the parish of Holylee was this season a late one, and there had been much cold and inclement weather during the ripening month, so that, well on in October, the crops, especially on the uplands, were still green, and promised badly for the thrashing-floor. Since the time Michael Forester came to Bracken Braes, there had been much more land brought into tillage along the course of the Heriot Water; and except now and then, in a late and unfavourable season like this, the new agriculture had been far from unproductive. It so happened that there were a greater number of acres under the plough this year than any previous one, and there was even a want of hands for the harvest. What happens in one hill parish generally happens in a great measure in another, and bands of shearers were now traversing the south of Scotland, some of them even from the most distant Highlands.

A small band, consisting of father, son, and daughter, had looked in at Bracken Braes, and were hired for a fortnight. At the expiration of that time they were to go to Ladyside, and it was probable they might get a few days likewise at Raeshaw. They had not been

at Bracken Braes half a week, till Donald Fraser had told the story of his not uneventful life.

Donald had been a soldier, and had seen service on the sands of Egypt under Abercromby. Although not the Highlander who took the invincible standard, he would not have been slow in taking it had it come in his way—and a bayonet in his hand must have been an unchancy weapon. Unfortunately, his broad breast and brawny limbs had escaped without a wound, so Donald had no pension. Foreign warfare and foreign climate had done his constitution some wrong, and, to say the truth, except by fits and starts, it did not appear that Donald had ever been very fond of work. On leaving the army, which he had been forced to do by rheumatism, that at one time threatened to leave him lame for life, he took up his abode in a hut near the head of the Dee—the most mountainous region perhaps in Scotland. He had left a wife and two children there when he joined the Forty-Second; and soon after his return, his wife died, leaving him to provide, as best he could in that solitary region, for Hamish and Flora. Year after year had passed away, and there had never been any absolute want of food or raiment, such as they were, in Donald's hut. The lochs were full of trout, the river of salmon, the heather mountains of grouse, and the forest of deer, and Donald had several fishing rods and one rifle. Now that his son and daughter were grown up, they had for several harvests sallied into the Lowlands, sometimes walking and working their way by Montrose and Kirkcaldy, and on the last occasion coming direct from Aberdeen to Edinburgh by the "Brilliant" steam-yacht.

Hamish was about nineteen years of age, of quiet manners and inoffensive disposition, as most Highlanders are when not put out of their way; but bold, active, and patient of hunger, cold, and toil. Beside his father, who was almost of gigantic mould, Hamish seemed little more than a dwarf; but he was, in fact, rather above the middle size, slim, straight, and muscular—every motion betokening the possession of strength and agility not thrown away on useless pastimes, but reserved for occasions of real need. The courtesy for which his poorest and most uneducated countrymen are so pleasingly distinguished, marked his demeanour in a more than ordinary degree; and when he threw aside his bonnet, his freckled and weather-beaten countenance, without being remarkable for one single feature—except, perhaps, its light-blue and sincere eyes—was extremely agreeable, and when lighted up with a smile, even handsome below its curls of yellow hair. There was not a better hook on the corn-rig than the young Highlander; for, besides going over much ground in little time, he left the stubble no higher than his ankle. As for food, he cared not about it, nor what it was, if wholesome—barley-meal and goat's milk had still been the chief fare in the hut by the Linn of Dee; although, it must be confessed, that a more potent liquor, when it came in the way, was in no disrepute, and that the old man especially, although he knew his besetting sin, was not very cautious against temptation.

Flora Fraser was one of those perfectly simple and harmless, say

at once innocent, creatures, of whom it is thought we may read in old songs and ballads—the fictions of imaginative minds in lowly life, but nowhere existing, even in the hut farthest remote from the haunts of men. But in those little traditionary strains of feeling and of genius, the human spirit speaks of itself no more than the truth; and although to those who live not among the lonely dwellers in the wild, and know them most imperfectly from the mere appearances of their outward condition, such pictures may seem false and visionary, yet the colours are true as those of twilight or the sunset heavens, and, touched by an unerring hand, obeying the genuine impulses of nature. Flora had slept all her life on heather or straw, and little or no care had ever been taken to keep her mind from the knowledge of those evils, and vices, and sins, that, like the seeds of plants, seemed to be wafted by the winds into the most secluded and solitary places, and sometimes grow there with a rank luxuriance, even below the same atmosphere that cherishes all the best charities of life. Although her father protected his daughter's virtue, and would have killed the man who offered to corrupt it, yet the rough old soldier had, of course, little delicacy of thinking or of speaking, and had not only witnessed, but taken a part in many a scene of turbulent and reckless enjoyment in those bloody but triumphant companies. But still, like some beautiful small bird of the mountains, that rises up, with unstained and shining plumage, from the dankest marsh, and in the midst of the raining mists, young Flora Fraser had retained all the hues of her native innocence, and returned home from her walks or occupations among the mountains, happy as that bird to its nest. And now, cheerful in the haughs or on the uplands of Holylee, as in the glens that open down to her own river, she sung her old Gaelic songs around Bracken Braes, or sat, sheltered in her tartan plaid, when the sleet came strong, below the hills that wanted the heather, on which, from infancy, she had watched her few sheep and goats, at the foot of the great Highland mountains.

Martha, who, for the last years of her childhood, had always been a worker in the open air, was not contented to remain at home in domestic occupations, and now joined the shearers. She and Hamish Fraser were together on the same corn-rig; and busy as they all were, still there was time for talk even during their work; and then, at meals taken in the field by the hedge-side, on some bank below a tree, all was glee and merriment with every group. Hamish and Martha were at first fellow-shearers, then acquaintances, and then friends; and before the fortnight was over, and all the fields covered with stooks, or some of them left naked by the wains rapidly moving to and fro from the stackyard, they were more to each other than friends, even lovers in all the warmth and tenderness of youthful affection. The Frasers always, after the day's work, walked down to the village to their beds, in a small apartment there; and it did not require much persuasion to induce Martha occasionally to accompany them; while old Donald led the way with his bagpipe, that sounded with a wild outlandish music among the braes—

laments and marches, melancholy or exulting, as over chiefs that had fallen, or with kilted battalions rushing to battle. Love was made both in shade and sunshine, without those young creatures knowing that it was love; and on the evening before the Highland party were to move to Ladyside, Martha promised to marry Hamish Fraser, and to go with him, if he chose, to the world's end.

Donald blamed in no measured terms his son's folly, and tried to frighten the young lovers by terrific pictures of the married life; but he had himself done the same thing in his youth; and when he saw that a marriage it would be, he gave Martha his blessing. Flora, too, cheerfully called her sister, for Martha was too passionately attached to Hamish not to give her affection freely to one so near akin to him. Lucy Forester was not held the less dear, nor did she become forgetful or ungrateful to her uncle and aunt; yet still from Bracken Braes she was willing to go, and fearlessly, and without an hour's hesitation, to enter into the uncertain prospects of a new life.

Not a little surprise was given to them all, at Michael's fireside, by this unexpected event; but what had happened was not to be changed. There was something to regret, but not to blame; and since Martha would go, it was now their duty to be as kind to her on her departure as they had been during her stay, and in as far as lay in their power to contribute to the comfort and respectability of her condition. Nature, where there is no guilt, may as well be allowed to take its course, even when prudence would say nay. Perhaps there was some wilfulness in Martha's disposition which could only fruitlessly have been opposed, and, if thwarted, would have affected not only her future happiness, but her very nature; and judging considerately and affectionately what was, on the whole, best for her condition and circumstances, Michael and Agnes used few arguments to dissuade her from her resolves; and then made a promise, which they faithfully kept, to treat her the same as ever while she stayed at Bracken Braes, and to send her, not only with their best prayer and advice, but with substantial comforts, into the wide world.

CHAPTER XLI.

The three merry harvest-homes at Raeshaw, Ladyside, and Bracken Braes, were not over till the first week in December. Many of the latest waggons left the marks of their wheels on the snow; and some patches of grain, that never ripened at all, fed the working horses in the field or stable. The large kitchens of these houses exhibited, each on its own night, a feast that was not long of melting away before many well-earned appetites. There was no distinction of rank between master and servant, heritor or hind, at these plenteous boards; nor was there any need of crabbed censor to restrain the harmless wit that ever and anon set the table in a

titter or a roar. Soon as the few toasts had been given, at the head of which, even before his well-beloved Majesty, Great George the King, came not with loud cheers, but low murmuring congratulations, "The Lady of the Hirst," tables, chairs, and forms were expeditiously removed, and the floor cleared for the dance, reel, or jig—for waltz or cotillon were yet unknown; while Bauldy Baird, successor to Blind Sandy Paisley, now under the mools, screwed his strings to the sticking-place, and, after a few prelusive flourishes, broke with all his birr into the Cameronian Rant, or Lord Macdonald's Reel. Martha and the young Highlander were conspicuous for the right good-will with which they tripped it and flung it to the gay strathspeys. Lucy did not decline the awkward bow and the bony hand of the homeliest suitor; and even Mary Morrison herself was once or twice on the floor, although she preferred sitting with Agnes or Isobel, or making herself useful among the refreshments. Old Donald had still in the room his unmerciful bagpipe, and among the "sma' hours," without asking leave of any one, blew up his chanter; and to the angry dismay of Bauldy Baird, whose fiddle was then no more heard than if it had been a mouse "cheepin i' the riggin," filled the house with a din that made many a pretty girl put her hands to her ears, and no doubt sorely disturbed the bonny grey cock, and his wives and family, in his adjoining roost beyond the hallan.

Now that all these festivities were over, and winter had fairly set in, who, to make amends for his absence the year before, brought with him his most boisterous train of storms and snows, the Highlanders spoke of taking their departure—not for their hut at the Linn of Dee, for that they had left for ever and a day, but for distant Canada. Donald Fraser had for many years been impatient of his poor and uncertain, and often inactive life, and had resolved to emigrate. He knew that he had a brother in Canada, although he had not for a long time heard directly from himself, and that he was also in a prosperous condition; many of his countrymen, and not a few of his clan, were settled there; and the old soldier, who had been in all climates, cared not if he should leave his bones in a foreign soil, since it was tilled by Highland hands. Hamish and Flora were willing to go with their father; and they were buoyed up by the adventurous spirit of youth, that looked with an imaginative eye into a life beyond the seas. It was not to be thought that Martha would be the one of the party most prone to regret or fear; she had been contented in Ellesmere, happy at Bracken Braes, and she now hoped to be even more than happy in the Canadian woods.

Michael Forester could not, however, agree to their plan of embarking at Greenock in a vessel just then about to sail, and insisted on their waiting till the winter hurricanes were over, and taking advantage of the more moderate breezes of early spring. With some difficulty the stubborn veteran was prevailed on to remain in the neighbourhood for a few months; and Ewebank, which, since Abraham Morrison's death, had been untenanted, was soon put into a habitable state. Donald and his son took immediate possession.

Michael sent over one of his best milch cows, and an old oak chest, by way of girnel, well filled in its two departments with oat and barley meal; Isobel added a few of her celebrated mutton-hams; and old Donald himself, who, if there was a still within six miles, scented it out with miraculous sagacity, procured by some inexplicable means a tolerable sized cask of mountain dew, in which he endeavoured to assure his sceptical friend, Mr Forester, that there was not a single headache.

Both the veteran and his son got plenty of winter work to do, and earned good wages. Martha was still an inmate of Bracken Braes, but there were few days on which she did not see her lover. It was fixed that the wedding was to take place on her birthday, in the middle of February, when she would have completed her seventeenth year; and they were to take their passage in the first Greenock ship that was to sail for Canada in March.

Meanwhile every hand was busy within Bracken Braes, getting ready clothes and comforts of all kinds for the voyage and their Canadian dwelling. Martha had never seemed to care much about dress before, although her Westmoreland education had taught her at all times to be neat and tidy about the house as a swallow; but now she half imitated the way in which Lucy put up her hair, and half adorned her ringlets, by more careful and assiduous touches of her own taste. In compliment to Hamish, or rather in undesigning sympathy, she sent all the way to Edinburgh for a plaid of the Fraser tartan; and whether it was that her features and complexion suited the colours of the web, or that her face was now tinged and animated by the glow of youthful passion, Martha certainly never had looked half so well before, and might even be said to have some pretensions to beauty. But Martha had no pretensions to anything she did not possess; and any little alteration that now took place, either in her appearance, her manners, or her general conduct, proceeded entirely from that blameless joy that rose within her heart at the thought or the sight of Hamish Fraser; and that, so far from engrossing her wholly, prompted her to even more than her usual obligingness and gratitude to everybody around her, from all her relations at Bracken Braes, to Alexander Ainslie at Holylee, who had driven them, years ago, down from Ellesmere. Seeing her cheerfulness, her industry, her activity, her intelligence, and her amiable disposition, now shown in a stronger and more trying light than ever, the whole family felt that they were going to lose a most excellent member, but at the same time one who was admirably adapted for the life she had chosen, and who would be happy, and make any kind husband happy, in any corner of the world.

The middle of February was not long of arriving; and the young Highlander issued out from the Manse, after Mr Kennedy had made them one, with Martha on his arm, amidst a loud shout of congratulation, sent up from all the village-school children, and others of a larger growth. Alexander Ainslie, whom nature had destined for one of the Tenth Hussars, took the lead, and kept it in the broose, on an iron-grey galloway, whose fame is yet rife in the parish of

Holylee. Donald led the foot procession across the hills, with cheeks before which the peony would have waxed pale, the drones of his pipe flowing with a hundred ribbons; and the day being calm, it is asserted that the concluding pibroch was heard in the kirkyard, all the way from Ewebank, although that solitary farm-house was three good Scottish miles from Holylee; and the length of any one of these may be judged of by all who have performed the distance at the close of a day's walk, when the wayside inn has seemed to retire into the mists, and the termination of a Scottish mile to be extended to a remoteness fearful to the very imagination.

About a fortnight after the wedding, a letter came from Donald's agent, a tide-waiter in Greenock, marked, "Haste and care"—an injunction to which, no doubt, all due attention was paid by more than one postmaster—urging him to appear forthwith on the quay for that the good ship "Montreal" was nearly ready for sea.

Before the marriage, Michael Forester had given Martha fifty pounds in money, and paid all their passages to Quebec; stores had been also purchased for them in Greenock; and Martha's wardrobe was little inferior in the number of articles, and far superior in solid worth, to many a young lady sailing in the Orient for a husband. Donald, Hamish, and Flora had each a privy purse—what sums they held did not appear, but they could not have been very magnificent, saved as they had been from the wages of their Lowland harvests. A certain sum was to be sent to them annually, after it was known where they had ultimately settled, so that the emigrants were to be independent of Donald's brother, who might be dead, or, if alive, unwilling to acknowledge the claims of kindred. There was, in good truth, nothing to send them away to Canada, but the hearts of one and all yearned for a foreign land; their cool determination had become longing desire; and even Martha was impatient to hear the rustling of the great ship's sails—so different from those that she had seen gliding along the blue water of Windermere—and that were to waft her away from the hollow skies, which lately had seemed to her to encircle the whole world.

The emigrants came to take farewell, most probably for ever, of their friends at Bracken Braes. Martha sat by the side of her youthful husband, and was waited upon by Lucy, who, with tears in her eyes, handed round wine and cake on the little silver tray she had got in a present from Emma Cranstoun. Mary Morrison could not help looking at the young bride almost with pity, for her sake, and with a mournful remembrance of her own sad story; but Aunt Isobel would not allow even a parting scene to be clouded with vain grief. "God bless you baith, my gude bairns—nae fear you will be happy. Hear how the very bird, in his cage there, sings to you—the first time he has tuned his pipes this spring—and isna it a cheerfu' sang? A' the world over, nae better omens are desired than the lilt o' birds; and in Scotland the maist encouraging is that o' the lintwhite and the mavis." Agnes put a small Bible into Martha's hand, and asked back her own as a memorial; Michael put his hand on her head, and remembering his brother Abel, gave her a

silent blessing; and then sweet Flora Fraser came in for her share of the tender farewell, when the emigrants at last rose to go. Lucy and Mary Morrison were not in the room; but they had gone to wait for them a little way down the burn, and they did not return home till more than an hour after their final departure.

CHAPTER XLII.

Once more had the sunny June loaded the woods of the Hirst with beauty, and darkened into grateful twilight a thousand glades, that, but a month ago, were all open to the sky. The grey walls of the ancient edifice could now be espied but from a few distant points; for oak, elm, and sycamore were hiding all its turrets. For two dull years the majestic and venerable place had lost the animating and presiding spirit, that breathed a cheerfulness throughout all its scenery. Although skilful hands had continued to do everything required by the perfect order and regularity of the walks, lawns, and gardens, that furnished a delightful contrast to the rich confusion of nature over the adjacent groves and remoter woods, yet, during the absence of the lady, many fine and delicate perceptions had been wanting, which had formerly discovered, almost every day, some new embellishment, or some magic change—perhaps no more than the lopping off a bough, or the thinning of a coppice-screen, that in a moment brought the airy distance to view, or a cottage embowered in trees, or a bright slope of hill-side, or a wider expanse of sky for the clouds to travel in or to repose. But now the Hirst was to be jocund as in its best days; for the wide gates of the avenue were flung open, and under an arch—a triumphal arch of flowers and blossoms—was the lady expected to pass to her native home, returning from blessed Italy in perfect health, and, as the rumour flew, if possible more beautiful than ever.

A few days before, there had been a meeting of some of the most intelligent of the tenantry, and they had arranged with the land-steward their plan of welcome. Ten thousand branches would never be missed in those extensive and gigantic woods; the removal of ten thousand flowery sprays would scarcely dim the lustre of that wilderness of lilacs and laburnums; the bees would know no difference among the banks of wallflowers, although troops of children were to carry away, in little baskets on their heads, all that their hands in one forenoon could gather of those balmiest treasures of our Scottish Flora; and if the earliest roses must go, although yet but in the bud, let them be plucked without a sigh, and trust to the prodigal summer to bring undiminished brightness to every parterre and terrace. But they all knew that the lady had been fond of roaming among the braes, and that she admired nothing more than the spreading fern, and the broom that yellowed the little lonely glens. Many a pretty plant and flower and weed grows almost in every solitary

nook, and places familiar only to the birds, bees, and sheep, were now rifled of their sweetness, that the triumphal arch might show to her gaze some of the native products of the hills, intermingling their simple charms with the richness of the lawn and garden. It was not till a little after sunrise, on the very morning the lady was expected to arrive, that the last touches were given to the arch by Lucy's own hands; and so many perfectly fresh and unfading flowers were clustering there, that the wandering bees wheeled from their forward flight to the clover lea, and lingered in the honey dew of those gorgeous garlands.

Such was the spirit of the festival; for among those lowly folks love looked to imagination to brighten the lady's birthplace to her eyes on her return from a foreign land. That triumphal arch was nothing less than most beautiful, with its shower of blossoms now moving in the breeze, and now, when the air was calm, depending steadfastly as images in water. But the bugle rang from the top of the central turret of the hall—a signal of the happy approach—and up came a splendid equipage sweeping along, while the tall white ostrich feathers, gracefully nodding in the airy sunshine, told all the joyful assemblage that the Lady of the Hirst was there. There was no shout, nor yet was there any music to sound a welcome; but all the tenantry stood with uncovered and bowed heads in salutation; not with downcast looks, as on the day she left them, but with smiles of rejoicing, and not a few tears, amidst a deepening murmur of blessings. On both sides of the entrance, immediately below the arch that shed flowers down upon their bosoms, stood a row of pretty children, all dressed in white, who dropped curtsies, with eyes fixed in admiration of their lady's angelic beauty, as she stood up in the carriage, and, perhaps little able to speak, waved blessings over all the crowd, with arms that, in their graceful motion, were fairer than the snow. A little apart from the main assemblage, in hopes of attracting the lady's eyes, stood the party from Bracken Braes; and Lucy's heart quaked with joy when that hand waved a kiss towards her, and a smile followed it of such piercing sweetness as placed her at once in heaven.

This was no idle pageant, that passes away, and leaves the heart half despising the emptiness of a fantastic dream. But here gratitude gave visible and vivid expression to itself, for its own and its object's delight, in the greenness of bough, and the brightness of blossom, which might, without any regret, all fade and wither in the next week's sun, since the feeling they symbolled was imperishable. The very children felt the whole meaning of the spectacle, of which themselves made a proud part; and the wonderful show of flowers was understood by them, as it indeed was, to be an offering to Heaven—although they had never heard of such altars—of thanksgiving for that beautiful being's escape from the grave. The Sabbath before, Mr Kennedy had alluded to her in his prayer; and that recollection now gave within every innocent heart over which it came a religious sanctity to the rural festival.

Nor was the assemblage suffered to depart and dissolve till the

Lady of the Hirst had an opportunity of more fully expressing her sense of the kindness shown, than she had been able to do in the sudden surprise of that delightful reception. A message was sent to Mr Forester, who was present, in perfect happiness, amidst the beauty of a scene which, from Lucy's words, he had been at no loss to imagine, that she would be happy to see all her friends, young and old, on the southern lawn. There they were soon arranged in an order that could not be otherwise than proper, since all fell into the places that were felt to belong to their own age, character, or condition. The door of the greenhouse opened, and down came the lady, with light steps, and across the carpet sod, close to the first row of her humble friends. With the sweetest smiles that ever were seen, she, first of all, said that she hoped happiness had been in their homes; and then, with a more solemn expression of eyes, returned thanks to God in their presence for His great mercy to herself. "But where is Lucy Forester?" These few words, said with a silvery tone, brought Lucy from her father's side; and as she stood there, with eyes downcast and cheeks pale in emotion, many thought that it was hard to tell which was the most beautiful—Emma Cranstoun or Lucy Forester. All, too, remembered that she had attended the lady in her illness, and had been instrumental in saving her very life. Was it not also well known that Lucy had been the friend of all, whenever she had been questioned about their firesides; and that from her representation their benefactress had learned all her true knowledge of the family at Bracken Braes? Therefore, not one heart there felt the slightest touch of envy on seeing Lucy thus singled out; while Michael, who had heard the words with sightless eyes towards heaven, was perhaps the happiest man there; and the gentle Agnes cared not if the whole assembly noticed her gushing tears. Emma Cranstoun kissed Lucy's cheek, and whispered a few words into her ear; and then, knowing her own station, and finely understanding how far the lady's condescension was at this time meant to extend, Michael's daughter, after a low obeisance, returned to his side, and the whole group expressed their pleasure and applause.

This had not been intended for one of those more ordinary commonplace merry meetings, where tables are placed beneath the shade, and the jovial tenantry of some great estate feast in honour of the house. Such festivals have their own peculiar character of happiness, and may they never be blotted out from the holidays. But here the meaning of the entire day was higher and more solemn: little parties were formed by the children and their parents, up and down the woods, at some considerable distance from the hall, which was now left altogether undisturbed; other groups took their frugal refreshments by the spring wells among the braes, plucking the water-cresses to their bread; and in not a few of the houses on the estate there were evening meetings of youths and maidens, who were all dressed already in their best array, and saw each other home among the falling dews and below the moon and stars.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Lucy had never, in former years, contemplated the beauty of Emma Cranstoun without melancholy; but now there was no occasion for any such feeling; for her step, although light as ever, was now far more elastic. Nothing like lassitude or decay belonged to her most graceful of all figures. Her voice was mellow as her own new-strung lute; and the joyfulness of grateful health tinged her face, without being able to overcome its characteristic pensiveness. She never could—never ought—never wished to forget, that from the very brink of death she had been restored; and that remembrance, present with her in her pleasantest hours, could not but give to her eyes a perpetual expression of piety, that threw an affecting light over all her ordinary pursuits. It might well have been said that her manners were religious, for they were all inspired by a spirit that was so indeed; and while Emma Cranstoun seldom or never introduced into her common conversation any of that language which, being divine, ought cautiously to be guarded against any involuntary profanation, her pious heart spoke in the entire structure of her speech. She said that she liked even to hear Lucy's Doric tongue; but what could be her pleasure, in all its simple or Scottish phrases, sweetly syllabled as they were, to the delight which Lucy enjoyed from that perfectly beautiful English that flowed from the lady's lips, expressive at once of all the highest endowments of mind and soul, and of a range both of thought and feeling to which the humble shepherdess of Bracken Braes feared even to raise her imagination?

Lucy felt now, even more than ever, the vast distance at which she stood from the Lady of the Hirst. But hers was still the same affection, not at all altered in its nature, only deepened and strengthened by a clearer insight into the order of things. When a child—at least a mere girl—she had often sat in the lady's presence, never, never indeed, with anything like the feeling of an equal, but almost without any restraint, and free of her own accord to talk or to smile. But now Lucy saw the nice duties of look and manner which that gracious and benign friendship imposed—duties that no one else could have discerned. There is nothing to hinder love from existing between persons in most unequal conditions, when each knows well the full nature of her own; and perhaps in some peculiarly felicitous instances, that very inequality preserves the completeness of the emotion, and continues it to the end pure, unfading, and entire. It was so with Emma Cranstoun and Lucy Forester. Here, it might be said, met together the genii of the hall and the hut; and who could pronounce which spirit was most beautiful—the lady with her dark hair braided across her pensive forehead, and a few pearls among the lace veil that shaped her head-dress into that which charms in old pictures of our Mary Queen—or the shepherdess with her golden tresses yet as rich in ringlets as when Isaac Mayne compared it to a star twinkling on the brow of the hill, with rays seem-

ingly half light and half dew, so bright, and yet so soft, the splendour?

"What a heart must be hers," thought Lucy, "never to have forgotten one single event or incident, however small, that we ever talked about—never to have lost the least part of her interest in any of the concerns of any one poor family in the whole parish, after an absence of two years—and these years, too, passed in struggling with disease in far-away countries! What a memory have the truly good!" All this was true, and no exaggeration of Lucy's admiring heart. Indeed, the Lady of the Hirst was more attached to it than ever; and now that her health allowed her to rise with the sun, what blessings was it in her power to bestow during the length of a midsummer day! At Bracken Braes all that was needed was her presence. "An hour in the week, on an average, all the year through, will content me," said the blind man; "a visit from her makes that day a Sabbath, Agnes—does it not?" And Agnes felt the very same state of mind her husband had thus expressed. Aunt Isobel, it seems, had once seen the lady's mother on the steps of Dalkeith House when she was a bride; but she was forced to confess that the living Emma Cranstoun was the fairer—one of the few instances on record of a daughter being more beautiful than her mother. Mary Morrison, now almost cheerful in her widowhood, yet meek as when that word was in childhood first applied by general consent to her name, desired no better happiness than to behold Lucy sitting in the lady's smiles; but if not a better, yet a more animating happiness was hers, when she herself too came in for her own share of kindness, retired as she most frequently was on some seat in a nook, or a little out of the circle, not to shun observation, for she had lived once more to love the sunshine, but from an humble habit learned in other days, and proceeding from a part of her very nature.

"Lucy, have you heard that my brother is coming to the Hirst? I fear that his long detention in France has not been for the benefit of his character; but I shall hope the best. You know that I had not seen Harry since I was almost a child; but last winter he came to see me at Rome. He is, alas! too much a foreigner—but he treated me with the greatest affection. I do not think that he will ever live at the Hirst; and he has told me that I may live here, if I choose, all my life." No words could be more happy to Lucy, for her heart did not expect, and scarcely wished ever to care much for, anything out of the parish of Holylee.

But Emma Cranstoun had another communication to confide to Lucy, and she was now led to do so from its connection with what she had said about her brother. "I am engaged, Lucy, to be married; but he who hopes to be my husband loves dearly the parish of Holylee, and we shall reside at the Hirst, if my brother prefers living abroad—if he possesses the hall of his forefathers, which I wish he may do, then Mr Ellis intends to purchase the Mains, and build a mansion there, on the site of the present ruin."

"Mr Ellis!" that word almost stopped the beatings of Lucy's heart, although at first it made it flutter nearly into a fainting fit;

but Emma Cranstoun was herself too much possessed by her own thoughts to observe her emotion. "Edward told me that he had frequently visited the family at Bracken Braes; and indeed, when I think of your moonlight journey, I could almost be jealous;" and Emma lifted her beautiful white arm to adjust a ringlet that she then felt upon her blushing cheek, with a smile that showed at once ignorance of poor Lucy's first love, and confidence in the power of her beauty. "I am sure, Lucy, you will admire my Edward; he, I know, will love every one I love; and there is not, and never will be, that friend dearer to my heart than Lucy Forester."

Lucy soon recovered her composure—and, indeed, what had there been said to agitate her, for had not Edward Ellis been long ago thought of with unpainful affection, and of late often removed out of her remembrance! And then, had not her own heart found more pleasure, more happiness, more delight, than perhaps she might be willing to confess, even to herself, in the company of Miles Colinson? Could she have laid her hand on that fair bosom, and denied that it had ever heaved a tender sigh when dreaming of Ellesmere? Was a dream of the days of old, once bright and beautiful as it was—and tender, most tender, in all its celestial bliss—to come back from the mist to drive away the pleasant prospects which were dawning around her life, or to deaden her spirit to the enjoyment of more sober realities? Lucy had too simple, too strong, too wise a heart, long to indulge in such delusions; and after a pause of not very many minutes, she kissed the lady's hand—an expression of attachment which she especially loved, because felt to be at once respectful and endearing—and after prayers for her happiness with Mr Ellis, as sincere as ever went to heaven, she returned perfectly happy, by the Gowan Green and the Hawkstane Spring, to Bracken Braes.

CHAPTER XLIV.

When Michael Forester compared all the circumstances of his life, from his earliest remembrances, with all that he knew of the lot of any other individual, high or low, rich or poor—and such comparisons had of late years been more and more frequently made by him in his solitary meditations, or in cheerful conversation with his beloved Agnes, when all the household were asleep—what reason had he to be grateful to Providence for so many undeserved blessings! Even their unceasing solicitude about Lucy had been to them both a source of happiness; for in all their anxieties they felt that she was nevertheless secure, and that their fears proceeded entirely from an excess of parental affection. Her beauty and her goodness were to them one idea; and when praying together, they felt assured that both were indestructible. Then, how had all their worldly affairs prospered! Rich they were not, nor wished to be; bad seasons and

fluctuating prices had affected them as well as their neighbours; and for a good many years they had had struggles to preserve their independence. But the farm of Bracken Braes had seemed to become more productive after Michael's blindness, not merely from its increased cultivation, but even as if the sunshine and the dews had visited it more genially since that affliction. All the money that Michael had at first to borrow had been repaid; Aunt Isobel's three hundred pounds had again been put into the bank in her own name—for, old as she was, it was yet possible that she might survive them all; the stock on the farm was his own, and the furniture in the house; and he had considerable sums lent on unexceptionable securities. Were Lucy ever to be left an orphan, she would be very far from destitute; and perhaps that confidence is the most perfectly soothing and satisfactory feeling that can fill the bosoms of affectionate and thoughtful parents. What more could they desire on this side the grave?

Now that Lucy was grown to woman's estate, they sometimes had spoken to her of such matters; and although at first she listened with a painful feeling—for the very possibility which these conversations implied of her parents' death was most distressing—yet, since they were so deeply interested in what they said, she did not interrupt them, and even put on an appearance of being interested herself, which was altogether foreign to her real state of mind. As long as her father and her mother lived, Lucy cared not either about riches or poverty; were they to die, she felt that nothing could ever lighten to her eyes the darkened earth. But they were both well, strong, and happy; neither were they old; and as for her mother, Lucy thought her—nor was she greatly deceived—except the Lady of the Hirst, the most beautiful person she had ever seen; but Emma Cranstoun was not yet twenty, and Agnes Hay nearly twice that age. Her matronly loveliness was yet admired by all; but they who remembered her when she first came into the parish of Holylee, doubted if at that time she could not have stood a comparison even with the lady, now in the perfection of her virgin beauty.

They were all sitting together under the plane-tree, and Lucy cheering the evening silence with a song, when a stranger, who had stood unobserved at a small distance during the time she was singing, advanced courteously, and introduced himself as Mr Maxwell. The name was one that had long since ceased to be familiar to Michael's mind; but Agnes at once recognised a likeness in his features to those of the gentleman whom she had seen at Dovenest, that evening her husband told her of the ruin of his fortunes. "I am the only son, Mr Forester, of Mr Maxwell who came into possession of your property between Lasswade and Roslin." These words awoke many remembrances in Michael's mind, but they were of no painful nature, for he had never repined from the first day he had left Dovenest, and had long been so perfectly reconciled to his lot that he often felt the pleasure of living over again his life in those quiet gardens washed by the Esk that murmured louder than the

Heriot Water in his dreams. "It is getting late in the evening, sir; will you be our guest till the morning?" Mr Maxwell assented, and they all went together into the house.

It was not till after supper and prayers that their guest spoke of any but ordinary subjects; but just as Lucy was lighting his taper, he asked leave to address them on an affair of some importance, and which he hoped would tend in some measure even to promote their domestic happiness, although he saw, and indeed previously knew, that it was built on a surer foundation than mere temporal prosperity. "My father, Mr Forester, was an honest and upright man, and I should be unworthy of calling myself his son did I not respect his memory. But by his successful industry I am now a rich man, and I am come to restore to you the full value of that property which, on an unfortunate occasion, passed from your into his hands. I do not say that I am unentitled to it, although my doubts are strong; but be that as it may, it is now yours; and had the place itself not long ago been purchased and repurchased, as you know, Dovenest itself should now have been put into your possession. Before I leave this roof, my words shall be made good."

Michael Forester continued to sit exactly in the same posture in which he was before Mr Maxwell began to speak, nor did any visible emotion pass over his placid countenance. Agnes looked at her husband, but her face was equally calm. Aunt Isobel alone spoke: "Ay—there is an honest man—something more than honest. Your very face, my friend, declares your character, and my heart warmed towards you when you knelt beside me on our earthen floor. Your substance will not be lessened by this act; but for it and others like it—for good deeds, like bad, never go single—Providence will bless your children's children." Mr Maxwell seemed to feel that his conduct scarcely deserved such benediction; but as his conscience told him that he was doing right, his heart did not wholly decline the old lady's commendations, and he had seldom been happier than he now was at that fireside.

Michael in a few minutes showed that very strong feelings were rising within his breast. The mere recovery of what had been lost so long ago did not affect him at all, but the principle of Mr Maxwell's conduct did so exceedingly, and there also came over him a deep sense of the goodness of his Maker. How had all things wrought together for the good of himself and family! His father had died quite happy at last, and full of years—poor Abel, after much suffering, no doubt, which his errors incurred, had found, when all his wanderings were over, a hopeful deathbed and a quiet grave—Martha the orphan, although far away, had prospects of happiness in that peaceful foreign land—who was so good and so happy as his beautiful Lucy?—Agnes Hay had brought blessings into his house which none enjoyed more than that gentle spirit—in extreme age, Aunt Isobel was cheerful as a new-stirred fire—and Mary Morrison, in her meekness, was like a child of their own at Bracken Braes.

For an hour after all the others had retired to rest, Michael sat

by himself in his chair, aware, from the cessation of the flickering sound, that the fire was dead on the hearth. It was pleasant to be alone in the perfect silence. His whole soul was calm and bright as the heavens stretched with their stars over all the quiet hills.

What stronger proof of the superior excellence and happiness of virtue, than that placid and serene contentment that is almost always the portion of the blind! That inner world, which is to us all the most essential world which we inhabit, is to them more clearly discovered than to ourselves. Our inward eye is dazzled with the light in which we live; but theirs, in its darkness, sees well and undisturbedly. Their mind is a clearer world to them, as it is also more clearly revealed. Hence it is, that, judging more justly of the human soul, they are less troubled with its passions. Cut off from so many of the amusements and pursuits of human life, and left so much to the dominion of their own silent spirits, they feel and know that there is no stability—no hope—no trust in vicious appetences or degrading thoughts. All these they fear and abhor as false friends, stealing upon the noiseless calm of their lives, and whose visit must bring and leave behind trouble and remorse. But kind affections—pure sentiments—lofty thoughts—gentle opinions of humanity—and devout feelings towards God; these are a solace and support, in which there can be nothing vain or delusive. Resignation is ever attended with its own perfect peace; and the blind, sitting in their solitude, and for a while forgotten, perhaps even by those who most tenderly love them, are happy, because their souls are true to virtue, and because the Great Being who inflicted the dispensation has more than compensated it, by that inward light which shines amidst the thickest darkness, with its own sacred and inextinguishable lustre.

CHAPTER XLV.

The Hirst had for several weeks been a scene of unusual festivities, for Henry Cranstoun, with several fashionable friends, had arrived there from London; and it soon appeared that his tastes and enjoyments were altogether of a different description from those of his incomparable sister. Mr Cranstoun had not been in Scotland since his childhood; for he had received his education at a great English school, and one of the English universities, and had afterwards been detained for many of the best and most critical years of his life at Verdun. That system of education, which has formed so many good and great men, had to him been productive of nothing but evil. His fine talents had either lain wilfully neglected or grossly misapplied—his passions had run riot in early indulgence—and before he left England, he had formed wild, irregular, and disorderly habits, which his long residence in France had confirmed. It was

not possible now, either to himself or others, to understand what was his natural character, it was so overlaid with foreign accomplishments, follies, and vices. His, however, had seemed to be the very worst kind of selfishness—that which enjoys nothing intensely unless there be about it something vicious or unlawful; and with all that cheerful laughter and airy demeanour, that to heedless observation betokened only good-humour and generosity, Henry Cranstoun had always an eye to his own gratifications, and would greedily grasp them to the sacrifice of every just and humane principle. But then he was in the prime of life—extremely handsome—skilled in almost every art of insinuation and allurement—master of all the modern languages of Europe—a consummate musician, for music was an art he might be said to have inherited—of an old family—and with a princely fortune.

It is surprising what a quick and true perception of the moral character of their superiors is often possessed by people in the lowest conditions. They may make great mistakes as to manners, acquirements, and intellectual capacity, but with regard to the essentials of worth their opinions are generally right. Virtue breathes without disguise—speaks openly—and appears forth clearly before men even in the most retiring of unostentatious characters. Its lustre cannot be hidden. If it shine not like a star, it will glimmer like a lighted window. Intellect often works in a sphere of which common men know nothing, not even its existence; and the famous genius may seem to them a recluse, ignorant of the world and all its concerns. But if there be great vices in a man's character, let his rank or riches be what they may, they will be reprobated by the honest poor in their huts. Outward respect may still be shown—for that is due to their station; and the peasant, shepherd, or hind, may, without reproach of conscience, unbonnet to his worthless landlord. But all his most courteous smiles, and words, and acts within the doors of their huts, or the gates of his own halls, will never purchase for such a man the smallest portion of genuine esteem. His entrance into humble households will be regarded with suspicion; and fathers and mothers will pray that their porch may be unvisited by him who knows not the value, and feels not the sanctity, of innocence.

Henry Cranstoun had not been many weeks at the Hirst, till he had become the object of such disturbed and disproving feelings and judgments very widely over the whole parish. He seemed either totally ignorant of the character of the peasantry on his estate, or insensible to its excellence. It was not a little rudeness, folly, error, or even apparent vice itself, that could have wholly alienated from the heir of an old house the affections of an intelligent and virtuous tenantry; but this infatuated young man seemed to have even a pleasure in insulting their holiest habits and deepest natural emotions. The Sabbaths at the Hirst were now disturbed with the noise of revelry, that had been heard by whole families walking through the woods to the house of God; and to the horror of the yet simple dwellers in the parish of Holylee, cards and dice, and other hideous gambling, were, according to rumour, rife there even on the Lord's

day. Servants, with more even than their master's reckless vices, and a pride almost equal to the debasement of their ignorance and the shocking brutality of their manners, swarmed about the old venerable Hirst; and some part of the indignation and scorn which the behaviour of these tyrannical slaves at the houses of poor men had far and near excited, could not but fall upon him who could not only endure their presence, but whose life seemed even to depend for many of its enjoyments on their base servilities and unprincipled cruelty. "There is nothing Scottish about him or his," was the bitter expression of many a father and mother's heart. "God grant the time be not far when he and his outlandish counts and valets disappear from Holylee!"

Emma Cranstoun conducted herself towards her brother in the way that might have been expected from so nearly perfect a character. She soon saw, with the deepest grief, that she must not hope to work any great change upon him in less time than years upon years; for his bad principles were rooted in a strong understanding, and his evil practice had made his heart callous. She endeavoured to make him comprehend the character of the people, by opening up to him some of their home habits; and she did not even scruple to beseech him to respect their prejudices; for had she called their reverence of all religious institutions by its true and high name, she would only have been more strongly exciting his ridicule or contempt. With bitterest tears of shame and grief, she beseeched him to remember that their innocence was the sole portion of the females of the poor man's family. "O brother! as you respect the purity of me, your sister, and would, I verily believe, rather see me dead than dishonoured, respect, for my sake, the purity of the harmless creatures, whose forefathers have even lived for generations on this estate. They have a hereditary claim to your protection; and methinks that were any infamy to come to them from yourself, or those whom you have chosen to be your friends, that I could not bear to look at these pictures of our blameless ancestors. See what venerable sweetness is on the face of Alice the Lovely, whose burial was a hundred years ago! But look—look here, my dear brother, this is the picture of our own sainted mother!" And Emma drew aside a black silk curtain, that shaded from the light a face drawn in crayons, which beamed with a mingled dignity and gentleness, not easily to be gazed on, now that their mother was in her tomb, without an emotion that, in its mournfulness, was akin to virtue.

To all these gentle and affectionate remonstrances of Emma Cranstoun, her brother was not altogether insensible; and however unapparent their influence had yet been on the general tenor of his conduct, they had at least awakened in his heart both a finer and a stronger feeling of affection for his mild and persuasive instructress. Perhaps he had hitherto loved his sister more on account of the pride he felt in her great beauty and accomplishments, which had burst suddenly upon him the first time he had seen her since a child that summer in Rome, than for the sake of her better worth; but now he felt the holy charm of virtue when seen shining forth in one

by nature necessarily so dear to him ; and in the midst of his own reckless profligacy he paid it an unaccepted and unavailing homage. Emma endured the disturbed and disreputable life he had introduced into that once peaceful hall, as long as she could do so with any propriety ; but her sense of duty and dignity at length overcame every other consideration, and she formed the resolution of leaving the Hirst for a season, and going with Mrs Ramsay to the seat of one of her father's oldest friends, who would probably understand the reason of her offered visit.

The character of young Cranstoun was nowhere better understood than at Bracken Braes ; and Michael, Agnes, and Isobel, had, one and all of them, cautioned Lucy to avoid at all times the slightest approach on his part to her company, at least when alone, either at the Hirst, in any of the valleys, or at their own house, which he had been much fonder of visiting lately than was agreeable to any one within its walls. This caution was not given in any doubt of his daughter, but to prevent the possibility of any unknown evil coming from that quarter. Lucy did not need any such warning, for she knew too well her own danger, or rather she knew what anger, and misery, and disturbance of spirit there would be at Bracken Braes, if her father had been aware of Mr Cranstoun's repeated attempts to gain upon her vanity, her simplicity, her ignorance, or her weakness —and Lucy was willing enough to confess that all these might belong to her character.

His sole desire and determination, since Henry Cranstoun had first seen Lucy Forester, was to get her into his power, and carry her off with him to the Continent. What was she but a peasant's daughter? Her father, to be sure, was a man far beyond the common run—and he was also a blind man, who would sorely miss the child heard for so many years in his darkness. Lucy was likewise, humbly born as she was, his own sister's bosom friend ; and her kindness, it was said, had even saved Emma's life. She was also a perfectly happy creature ; and to destroy great human happiness requires a cold, or a stern, or a fierce heart. But then she was beautiful—ay, beautiful as an angel, and not less innocent ; and his heart, which had so long been the victim, the slave of passion, beat, and leapt, and bounded at the forethought of all that angelical beauty and innocence being prest in transport to his bosom, although afterwards might come shame, sorrow, despair, and death.

Had Lucy known all that the heart of Henry Cranstoun had planned against her, sooner would the small singing-bird have left the hawthorn hedge when it saw the merlin on the wing, than she have forsaken for an hour the shelter of Bracken Braes. But innocence suspects not, nor, if it did, could penetrate into the dark secrets of that heart from which pity and honour and religion are all flung aside ; and nothing heard, felt, or obeyed, but the cry of passion, unresisted in its long career and conquest of crime and misery.

Henry Cranstoun had had his spies and emissaries at watch and at work through all the parish. He knew every step that Lucy took half-a-mile from Bracken Braes. Did she go to Raeshaw, to Lady-

side, to the Manse, to Ewebank, to any hut without even a name, her visit, if one that had been previously intended, was already known to him at the Hirst. He had sometimes been at her side among the braes, as if he had risen out of the earth, and had come carelessly and accidentally into the solitary dwellings where Lucy perhaps had gone to see some sick or dying person, or to offer some charitable office to the poor. He stood not in awe of that God whose servant the young, the humble, innocent, and happy creature was upon those affecting occasions; and he would have ruined the soul of her whom he might have beheld kneeling in prayer by the sick-beds of the widow and the orphan, or gliding home to her blind father's dwelling with a song that cheered the solitary braes, and seemed to leave its music in the wild moors. Her innocence, he saw, could never be corrupted—but it might be betrayed; and were Lucy Forester away with him into another country—away beyond the seas—cut off from Bracken Braes by hundreds of leagues of land and seas, with all their mountains and waves, might she not perhaps become his in her homeless, hopeless destitution and despair, and might not his joy, his happiness, his bliss be perfect at last in that sacrifice?

But Emma Cranstoun, although she had never breathed a syllable of her suspicions to her brother, had been for some time more unhappy and afraid even than Lucy herself of his wicked designs. Indeed, it was her miserable conviction of some meditated evil, too dreadful even to be alluded to, that finally determined her to leave the Hirst, and to take Lucy with her to Ballendean. Michael and Agnes, although almost daily expecting a visit from Miles Colinson, did not think of making any objections to this plan, under circumstances which they fully understood, without putting that lady under any necessity of entering into any lengthened explanation; so it was fixed that Emma Cranstoun was to send over a servant for Lucy next evening, and that she should accompany herself and Mrs Ramsay to Ballendean, where they would remain till her brother and his companions left the Hirst.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Lucy had left Bracken Braes in the evening, on Emma Cranstoun's own palfrey, under care of a servant; and Mary Morrison had tripped on foot by her side as far as the well-known Gowan Green. There she had parted from her friend with a kiss, and kept her eyes upon her till she saw the horses following the bridle-road towards Ewebank. "Ay, ay!" said Mary to herself, "Lucy is just going round by the house where I used to live, to take a look at the sweet birchwood where we have so often sat together, in days when I was as happy and as innocent as herself!"—and then returned to the Heriot Water.

Michael never slept very soundly when Lucy was from home; and he now rose in the gloaming, before the sun had shown his disc over Raven Crag, or awakened a bird in the eaves or the plane-tree. It was the dawn of the 12th of August; and no sooner had the light broken, than the frequent gun of the fowler was heard on the hills. A foot came up the avenue, and a voice said—"Mr Forester, here is a letter from the Hirst." Michael took it to Agnes. It was from the lady herself; and expressed much surprise that Lucy Forester had not, according to agreement, come to the Hirst; with tender inquiries as to the cause of her not appearing—which, she trusted, was not illness, either of herself or any one at Bracken Braes.

Every inmate was soon up; and a dire and dismal distraction, in which reason itself was baffled, prevailed over the whole family. Their fears all connected themselves with Henry Cranstoun; but nobody yet expressed them, till Michael himself said—"Let us trust in that God who has never yet forsaken us, and whose providence, although often inscrutable, will not suffer our child to be destroyed!" But every minute brought its own horrid thought; and there was an uncertain and hurried walking about, as if the tenement had been on fire.

Mary Morrison, who had gone out to speak with the person who had brought the letter, came back with a quick pace to the room, and said, "Here is Mr Miles Colinson—here is Mr Miles Colinson!" Aunt Isobel—for Michael and Agnes were sitting in a sort of stupor—went and brought him in, after telling him, in a few words, at what crisis he had arrived. "You have come to us just when we have lost our Lucy, Mr Colinson. A villain has taken her from us—from Agnes there, and me, her blind father; and dreadful are the decrees of the Most Merciful and the Most High!"

It seemed that nothing was in their power to do, any more than if they had all been chained in a dungeon. Into what quarter of the horizon should the pursuers go? Hours—hours—many long hours had there been—a whole night of hours—since Lucy had fallen into the fatal snare. As well go seek for a dropt pearl from the hair over the bounds of a great forest, as seek for Lucy Forester now among all those mountains! The light of morn must have found her far—far off from Bracken Braes; or perhaps the light of morn may not yet have visited her weeping eyes in some dark den, known only to that pitiless Atheist.

Perhaps Miles Colinson was now a more miserable man even than Michael Forester. He had come to woo his bride in her father's house; and, lo! she had been carried off by a ravisher. Yet, wicked as the world is, there are bounds, he thought and said, set to wickedness, which even a demon from below could not have power to overleap; and a hope came, even from his being the brother of Emma Cranstoun, that Lucy might find mercy at his hands. They all knew that Lucy would walk into a burial vault, and be left there to die of hunger, rather than break one of God's commandments. A sort of wild joy was in Michael's broken voice, as he cried out—"O that she had the wings of a dove, that she might come flying back to her

blind father!"—"Fear it not, fear it not," said Aunt Isobel, now too old to weep, but whose hope was strong as possession both of this world and the world beyond the grave; "safe is she at this hour, wherever she be, as the youths in the fiery furnace; nor shall a hair of her head be skaithed."

Mary Morrison now mentioned that Lucy had left the direct road to the Hirst, and had gone up the brae towards Ewebank. A sort of light glimmered in upon Michael's mind. As Ewebank was a very lonely place, it was possible that his daughter had been wiled away thither by some pretence; and he called to mind, too, that it was now inhabited by a person of no very good character, who hung loose on society, and did not follow any regular profession. Such place, and such person, seemed well fitted for the nefarious wickedness he feared; and the blind man, taking his staff, requested Miles Colinson to accompany him to Ewebank.

When they reached that solitary house, no smoke came from the chimney, and nothing was stirring about it any more than if it had been uninhabited. The door was locked, the window-shutters closed, or rather the light excluded by boards, and branches of broom and fern. Miles Colinson heard nothing; but Michael said—"There are people in the house: I hear footsteps and whispering." No answer being given to their words, Michael Forester put his hand and foot to the door, and it flew open like that of a childish plaything. Wat Armstrong met him in the passage with a fierce countenance; but Miles Colinson was not a man to be intimidated, and stepped forward between the blind man and his opponent. "Is the tenant of this house at home?" said Michael; "and if so, why has he barricaded his door?" It was too late to offer resistance to the resolute blind man and his friend; for Lucy had heard their voices, and was already in her father's arms. There too was Henry Cranstoun, the representative of an ancient and honourable family, standing, like a condemned felon, in a clay-built hut, on his own hereditary estate.

Lucy Forester's eyes were red with weeping—her cheeks dim in the rosy beauty which no agony could altogether blanch—and her silken hair, which almost one single touch of her hand could trick into graceful wreaths, sorely dishevelled. But now there was perfect restoration brought to her disturbed spirit—her kindling smiles revived; and, kneeling down, she gave thanks to the Great Power that had protected her innocence. "I offered no violence to your daughter, Mr Forester—I loved her, and I repent of my gross misconduct. What more can I do?—Tell what amends I can make. The best farm on the estate will be yours, rent free."—"Base robber, speak not to me of farms and rents—the dead ground, and the worthless dross; but look into my face—behold how God has been pleased to extinguish these eyes within their sockets, and then tremble lest His vengeance smite you dead in your sins. Lucy, my beloved child, rise up—rise up;" for Michael felt her clasped hands resting on his knees, and his tears of thankfulness fell down upon her forehead, as her eyes, that had just been turned to heaven, now calmly contemplated her father's countenance. Miles Colinson gazed on that sight,

and so received it into his very soul, that fade away would it never more till the last hour of his life. But the betrayer could not endure the scene before him, and disappeared.

Rescued from that horror, Lucy looked on Miles Colinson as her deliverer. He it was that now raised her in his arms from the floor, and felt privileged, in her father's presence, to press her to his bosom. There was no one in the hut but themselves; the storm was over, and there was now almost a perfect calm; nor was Lucy released from that gentle embrace till she heard an earnest prayer breathed close to her cheek, that Heaven would inspire her heart with affection, and grant such a wife to one who would cherish and guard her like a sacred thing. That prayer was not unheard by the blind man; and he blessed them both, as they stood together by his side, and called them by one name—"My children!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

Michael Forester would have spared him who had wickedly designed to rob him of his all, the shame of exposure; but rumours soon ran from house to house among the braes, like echoes; and before night the whole parish was stirred with indignant reprobation. Such profligacy appalled every parent—the rescue of the innocent came home to every heart; and here there was not a single circumstance of extenuation—on the contrary, all was hideously and impiously cruel. Will Michael Forester continue to live, after such an outrage, at Bracken Braes? Ought not punishment to be inflicted on the criminal? Such thoughts were at every fireside; and he who could so easily have had his name pronounced with constant blessings, was now cursed as an evil spirit that had come to ruin the peace of families, and to spread corruption over the whole countryside.

Next morning was the Sabbath, and the family from Bracken Braes went, as usual, to the place of worship. In the kirkyard one subject alone was spoken of among the various groups assembled there; and when Mr Forester appeared, walking between his wife and daughter, although no one alluded, in the most distant way, to the events of the preceding day, the salutations they received from every quarter were most earnest, and sufficiently expressed the general sympathy. There, too, was the Lady of the Hirst, evidently looking around for one family. She soon discovered Lucy, and, putting her arm within hers, she took her up to her own seat in the gallery. The eyes of the whole congregation approved; and Mr Kennedy himself gave Lucy a look of kind recognition from the pulpit.

As the congregation was dismissing, words of shocking import spread from one person to another, till there was a general conster-

nation. The lady's brother had been found, during the very time Divine worship had been performing, lying in a lonesome place within the Hirst woods, mortally wounded. It was rumoured that there had been a duel, and that all the gentlemen residing at the hall had fled. Emma Cranstoun's ears could not but receive the fatal tidings even before she had left her seat in the kirk, and while she was whispering in a low voice to Lucy about the unhappy man now dying or dead.

Before evening, Michael, Agnes, and Lucy were all three at the Hirst. The lady had indeed need of comfort now, for her brother's eyes were shut for ever—his career of guilt at an end—without more than a few, a very few agonised or fainting hours for repentance. Two strangers had that morning come to the Hirst, and they had again left it, but not till, from the hand of one of them, Henry Cranstoun had received his death-wound. Emma had not even the melancholy comfort to know that his fate had been undeserved; for almost his last words were to say that Captain Lorimer had behaved like a man of honour, and that he had justly punished with death his sister's seducer.

The feelings which now wrung Emma Cranstoun's heart were not those of grief and pity alone, but of a more awful and overwhelming nature. Till within these very few months, she had never been with her brother, except that one week at Rome. But natural affection does not wait even for worth to awaken it; and her heart had yearned towards him in the midst of those vices which it bled to think of, and would have died to cure. Not a pleasing, or fine, or good trait in his character, but she had fixed her eyes upon it alone, with the loving hope of being able to exaggerate it into a virtue. But now, there he lay, with all that once ardent blood cold as the frozen stream—that face, whose changeful features kindled every hour with the expression of so many passions, had now but one meaning—rest, eternal rest! The soul—the immortal soul—had gone to judgment; and even in the Book of Mercy are there not dreadful images of the world to come?

The Lady of the Hirst had many friends in her own rank of life, for she never had had any wish to seclude herself from society, which she both enjoyed and adorned; and in this great distress there were more than one whose presence would have been a comfort. But during the first days of death the house stands silent, and dearest friends do not feel privileged to look on the mourner's face till the final ceremony is over, and all vanished. Lucy Forester, however, remained on that Sabbath evening when the others went away, and for several nights occupied the bed where she had so often lain whole nights without sleeping, when it was thought the lady was dying of a consumption; and her presence was again a greater blessing than could be told during the midnight hours, when grief comes upon the very dreams of those who weep.

There was a burial-place about half-a-mile from the hall, in an old wood; an open space had been left, centuries ago, when the acorns were planted, and in it a mausoleum had been built. The arms of

the oaks had extended farther, perhaps, than had been contemplated, and one enormous tree flung a mossy limb across the melancholy lawn, quite close to the gateway of the tomb. All about the dark walls were yews that shrouded it in perpetual gloom; and the sound of a stream, flowing in the forest, might sometimes be heard, and sometimes not, by any solitary person wandering into that stern seclusion. The martens built their nests in crevices of the somewhat dilapidated building; and the roes, knowing how unfrequented was the place, harboured below that grove, and among its surrounding thickets.

The whole tenantry followed the bier to this burial-place; the iron gate once more recoiled on its rusty hinges, and the remains of Henry Cranstoun were left to moulder away among the bones of his ancestors. All reproachful thoughts were dead. Had he lived, he might have become a better—a good man—even a Christian; for what revolutions have taken place in those spiritual kingdoms, the souls of men? And with these, and such reflections, silent or expressed, the funeral party dissolved away among the woods.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Lucy remained for a week after the funeral with Emma Cranstoun; nor did one strong wish to be at Bracken Braes, notwithstanding the presence there of one so dear, enter a heart so filled as hers was with pity and friendship. The rueful calamity was such as to hinder, during its first dark days, the movement of all deep feelings on any other subject; and although there were, in both their breasts, feelings so very deep as never again to be obliterated, yet the images of Edward Ellis and Miles Colinson either did not rise up before them at all, or if they did, each image was contemplated with perfect freedom from any agitating emotion, by her to whom it was more especially interesting; for in such hearts as theirs, love, instead of swallowing up in its own passionate selfishness every other feeling, strengthens and purifies them, lending to them all much of its own enthusiastic and spiritual nature. At the end of a week Lucy returned to Bracken Braes.

Almost unconsciously had these lovers been betrothed; but on their very first meeting they remembered that the betrothment had received the fervent blessings of their father. Few words had been uttered at that disturbed time, but these few bound their hearts for life with all the sanctity of an oath, felt to be inviolable. Little or no agitating passion had preceded their declarations of everlasting attachment—indeed, with Lucy, the charm of her love to her own spirit was its perfect peace. Since last summer, when her lover began first to be dear, she had been carried away down the quiet hours imperceptibly into the final calm of their affection—as a boat, in

which two friends are sitting, may drift away down the dreamlike scenery of some river, till it is found anchored in a beautiful lake.

All their roamings, last summer, over the braes and through the woods, had been as happy as they had then desired life to be; but the earth was now greener to their eyes, and the heaven bright even without its sunshine. Then their parties had been larger—for Ruth, and Mary Morrison, and Martha, were generally there; and the spirit that seemed chiefly to animate them was the natural gaiety of youthful existence. But now Lucy and Miles walked all alone into the secluded glens—and all alone reclined by the murmurs of the solitary rivulets. There was no merriment—no laughter—sometimes not many words. Thoughts and feelings often rose up into looks and smiles; and when the lovers were mute in the solitude, the silence was divine. Day after day they felt themselves more and more belonging exclusively to one another—and dreams of the future brought a tenderer light upon the sunshine of their present happiness. "O beautiful Ellesmere!" breathed Lucy in a whisper to her lover; and as her head rested on his bosom, she asked her heart, with a self-upbraiding sigh, if it were indeed possible that hour had come when she could think of leaving her blind father without his Lucy at Bracken Braes!

The long-continued and habitual moderation of spirit belonging to Michael Forester in his resigned blindness, was scarcely proof against the intense happiness which rose from the prospect of Lucy's marriage. Although his daughter had been, from the first day of his loss of sight, so necessary to him, that without her guiding voice and hand he would probably never have learned to extend the circle of his unattended walks beyond the gate of the avenue, and although her presence in the room had for years been a sort of sunshine, which even the blind could see, yet Michael felt, on the present occasion, that it had all along been her happiness that was his comfort, and that to lose her, since that happiness was about to be increased, so far from being any rational cause of sorrow, ought, and assuredly would, increase tenfold the gratitude of those left behind at Bracken Braes. The events of the last few days had shown what evils might gather round her beauty; and if her father should die, what might become of Lucy in this bewildering world? But now there were to be two nests for the dove; and should the winds injure or blow down the one at Bracken Braes, the other might still be hers in the sheltered vale of Ellesmere.

The same feelings possessed the maternal bosom of the gentle Agnes. She had never feared for Lucy, except when she thought of her somewhat warm and impetuous character, rather too apt to give way to sudden emotion, and to urge her forwards incautiously at least, if not imprudently, upon the path her heart had chosen. Yet Lucy had never yielded to or obeyed any strong impulse, unless it prompted to deeds of kindness and humanity; and her mother rather trembled at the possibility of her being led astray, than from the recollection of any instances in which her conduct could be justly reprehended. Lucy's ardour and fearlessness in all innocent

pursuits—her disposition to revel in joy the very instant she left her blind father's side—her utter incapacity of suspicion, or of belief in guile or wickedness—her quick, eager temper, whose anger was neither more boisterous nor permanent than the breeze that comes rustling down the birch wood, and in a minute forsakes the leaves—and her readiness to sacrifice anything, however sweet to herself, to the more insignificant interests of her friends—nay, even her acquaintances. All these traits in her character, at once endearing to others, and dangerous to the lovely creature herself, had often disturbed her mother's sleep. But under the safeguard of such a husband as Miles Colinson all these qualities would be sources of happiness alone—time, instead of blighting, would beautify such flowers as these; and she could not but be a happy wife who had, in the sight of men, angels, and the Almighty, been the best and most blessed of daughters. Already was the expression of her bright eyes somewhat subdued; her steps were gliding into a slower gait, in its gentleness almost matronly; the tears were sometimes seen on her cheek, probably as she dreamed of leaving them all at Bracken Braes; and, in truth, Lucy Forester sometimes already bore almost the placid, quiet, and thoughtful countenance of a bride.

The month of August had gone, and the first half of the beautiful September, that seemed almost to court the first stealing touches of the frost. It was time for Miles Colinson to return to Ellesmere, and Lucy was contented not to see him again till the following June. Why should they hasten their marriage? Lucy was not yet eighteen, although she wanted but a few months of that age—months that could bring no accession to her loveliness, although they would, doubtlessly, bring knowledge and wisdom to a heart awakened to a new and sacred passion. A few months' longer possession of their dutiful child was something to her father and mother; and Lucy, in the blissful calm of her affection for Miles Colinson, could have been happy so long as he was so, in years of betrothed separation. Next summer, then, they were to be married; and Aunt Isobel, who frequently spoke of her own death with as much cheerfulness as she could do of going to bed after a busy day, said that she would pray to be allowed to be present at that wedding, and then care not about seeing another Christmas. "The dear bairn will be little more than eighteen years old on that day, and I upwards of fourscore and five—but, Heaven preserve us! what fine madam is this at the door? Come ben, Miss or Mistress—how is your lady ower-by yonder at the hall?" This fine madam, as Aunt Isobel called her, was Emma Cranstoun's Swiss maid—a very excellent kind creature in her way, although fond of lace, veils, and feathers, to a degree that excited the wonder of the whole parish. Her head, at this particular time nodded lugubriously like the plumes of a hearse; although her face was all one smile, and her gesticulation, as she gave Lucy a letter, expressive of a general delight—not so much proceeding from any one specific cause, as from the vivacity of her own peculiar and national character. The letter merely informed Lucy that the Lady of the Hirst would, by the

time it was received, be on her way on foot, and with a friend, by the Gowan Green path, to Bracken Braes.

Lucy and Miles Colinson immediately set out to meet the lady; and before they had gone two miles, the parties were all together in a lonesome nook among the hills—Emma Cranstoun and Edward Ellis, Lucy Forester and Miles Colinson, meeting at the Hawkstane Spring! Edward and Lucy had a dream of their own; and after the first emotion, it was far from being undelightful. There they had stood, a few years ago, as they thought, as indeed they were, in love—the pure, imaginative, visionary love of youth, as yet equally ignorant of itself and the world. There were innocent and blameless secrets, that needed not to be revealed to any ear; too dim, in the distance of the past, to be distinctly remembered even by their own hearts; too vague and wordless to be communicated; and as Edward turned towards his Emma, and Lucy looked at Miles Colinson, without any perceptible embarrassment, and with sentiments of mutual admiration and esteem—they who had journeyed together over the moonlit hills, and almost slept in each other's innocent arms, saluted each other as friends, who at last possessed the happiness appropriate to their condition, and would remain friends, in the best sense of the word, throughout life.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Whether has the lover of nature's works—the solitary pedestrian, who finds beauty everywhere without seeking for it—had most delight in his roaming reveries among the pastoral paradise of Scotland, where his imagination, lending its own light to the scenery and the people, has restored the age of gold—or among some of the richer valleys of merry England, where there is little need for fiction to embellish or change the truth, but almost every human habitation is indeed a perfect picture, ready formed to the eye of taste or genius? Perhaps remembrances come in such crowds upon the mind that delights to embody all its visions of the past, that there is a confusion of feelings, leaving no distinctive judgment of the peculiar characteristics of those two beautiful kingdoms. Then too, for one scene vividly remembered, a hundred are well-nigh forgotten. Entire days—walks by the sides of lochs and rivers, are as if they had never been—unnumbered glorious sunsets have been in vain shown to ungrateful worshippers—cataracts are pealing in the solitude, once visited in awe, and since heard no more—and the thunderstorms that shook the everlasting mountains have not left in the imagination so much as a whisper. Which country then shall be said to be the most impressive—and what pilgrim shall declare the judgment?

But let the decision of such questions be left to the poet and the

painter; and let Agnes, and Lucy, and Mary Morrison, and even old Aunt Isobel, judge for themselves of the comparative merit of Ellesmere and Bracken Braes. For Michael Forester and all his family are at the Vicarage; and a brighter, perhaps so bright a June never glittered on the lone banks of the sweet Heriot Water and the braes of Holylee, as now glitters on Risedale Beck, wherever its streams and pools are open to the day, among meadows for ever losing themselves in the overshadowing woods of Ellesmere.

It was no less than four years ago since Agnes and Lucy were at the Vicarage; and much as they had then loved and admired it, it seemed now to them both a place whose delightful character they had not in the least understood. Every day gave them an insight into the meaning of every object they beheld; and they discovered, of themselves, reasons why the beauty of the vale was so various, and never could be injured. Miles Colinson showed them the very spirit of the place; and Lucy every night lay down with some new charm mingling in the scenery of her dreams. Here she was to live—here most probably die—and in the churchyard of the chapel, at the foot of those great mountains, her bones would be laid along with those of the Colinsons, who had been dwellers in the vale of Ellesmere for several centuries. Melancholy thoughts often arise out of our very happiest hopes, and indeed seem almost inseparable from them; for hopes are onward gazing, and the vista has, and can have at last, but one termination. But this union of the sweetness and the sadness of fancy is perhaps the most blissful of all moods of mind; and youthful lovers feel it to be so, when to their approaching happiness there seems to be no other alloy, but the knowledge of the frailty of human nature, and of the sudden obscuration or eclipse to which the light of all human happiness is everlastingly exposed.

The lovers thought themselves happy—the happiest living beings on all the earth; but Michael Forester and his Agnes were far happier. The blind father had always been a thoughtful, never a melancholy man; yet if all the sad feelings that had assailed his heart on Lucy's account for the last seven or eight years had been collected together, they would have made up a great sum of sorrow. All were now at an end; and not only so, but vivid and rejoicing emotions took their place, so that even Agnes herself, whose eyes had never been off her blind husband's countenance for one daylight hour together since the lightning had passed over it, could not help wondering at the change, and felt as if the same sedate cheerfulness of his manly beauty, which won her heart at Dovenest so long ago, had been restored. But just as great a change had been wrought on Agnes herself, and Michael perceived it in her voice. Much of that same glad tone returned to it, with which she had charmed every heart in the years of her maidenhood—and for years too of her wedded life, when Lucy was a mere sportful child, for whom it was needless yet to cherish any mournful fears. Agnes Hay was indeed almost in the very prime of life; and Michael believed Aunt Isobel, when she said that her child was still as beautiful as the day when she was a bride.

The marriage-day was now near at hand; and there was not in all Westmoreland a prettier cottage than the one ready for the reception of Miles Colinson and his Lucy. It had been built, about two years before, by the vicar's only brother, Mr Brathwaite Colinson, a London solicitor, who had returned, rich, to pass his latter days in the quiet of his native valley. But the old gentleman felt Oldfield to be somewhat too dull and lonely for one of his metropolitan habits, and had taken refuge in the Vicarage. There he had his own parlour looking into the orchard—a room full of many gimcracks—for the solicitor was something of a mechanician—and had a box of tools, by means of which he bodied forth many things unknown, and invented very extraordinary pieces of ornamental furniture. Few men made angling rods better than he; and he had been engaged for nearly three years on a fiddle, which it seemed likely he would leave in an unfinished state. But Brathwaite Colinson had a heart as warmly affectionate as when he left Ellesmere fifty years ago in a suit of country grey; and although he had loved to accumulate money, he himself now rejoiced to feel that he was no miser, and determined to make his nephew, Miles, independent before his marriage. At the very first sight of Lucy Forester his heart was more than ever expanded with an emotion of permanent generosity, and he loved her as well as his own niece Ruth.

But although Oldfield had seemed a dull residence to an old bachelor like the solicitor, it was in truth one of the most cheerful places imaginable, and the most beautiful too in all Ellesmere. The house seemed to be situated low, for it was surrounded by knolls, rocks, hills, and mountains; but it in fact stood at a considerable elevation above the stream; and a sloping lawn carried the eye gently down to a waterfall—for the close-nibbling sheep had made a lawn of a field, whose daisies and clover had not been disturbed by the plough in man's memory, although ridges were still visible. Brathwaite Colinson loved too well the picturesque architecture of the Westmoreland cottages, to build on his farm of Oldfield a town house, or suburban box, or rural villa. He had only to look at the Vicarage itself, and an edifice rose up, another and the same, with such varieties as imagination, in this case little more than memory, easily created. The roof might almost be said to undulate, when the eye looked down on its angular and irregular terraces—latticed windows peeped out unexpectedly, each upon its own home view or far mountain prospect—and the round tall chimneys carried the smoke well up among the trees, that in a year or two must be felled, else they would infallibly overshadow the house in the strongest sunshine.

During each of the years that the Foresters had lived at Bracken Braes, some small new article of furniture had crept into the house; so that, at an expense quite imperceptible—even to them who were almost poor—it was, within, like the ornamented cottage of some tasteful man of fortune. Lucy had the whole furnishing of Oldfield left entirely to her own judgment; and, on consulting her lover, was pleased to be told, "Make it as like as you can to Bracken Braes." But this Lucy did not wish altogether to do; for she loved the old

glossy dark oak-wood furniture of the Westmoreland houses, with all its ancient and not inelegant carved-work, and fond as she was of Scotland, and all that belonged to it, she did not forget that the taste and imagination of every one are formed in those delightful days, when every household object has a charm which will belong for ever to all that is peculiar to the country where we were born and passed our youth.

Ruth Colinson was not to be, as she had rashly promised, bridesmaid to Lucy Forester; and for the best of all reasons—she was to be married herself, on the same day, to Captain Marshall of Seathwaite Hall, Ullswater. Well did Lucy yet remember his kind and manly countenance, and that too of his pretty sister, the joyful Agatha. Agatha was now already engaged to be bridesmaid to Ruth; and Lucy had therefore, in that extremity, to apply to Ellinor Elleray of Rydal, half afraid—and not more than half afraid—that her own beauty might be eclipsed by that celebrated May-day Queen.

CHAPTER L.

Ellesmere had dawned forth into faint and softest beauty, "under the opening eyelids of the morn," as the dewy hours melted away before the bolder light; the woods and groves were all crowned with their green and yellow glories; and by ten o'clock—the appointed time for the marriage-party to leave the Vicarage and proceed to the chapel—all nature was rejoicing in a summer forenoon as bright, blue, and cloudless as ever shone over heaven.

There had, for more than one hour, been a pleasant agitation at the heart of the Vicarage. Not a few hands had been busily and tenderly engaged in adorning the brides. That duty had been left to the young. Agnes and the vicar's wife sat with their husbands; while Aunt Isobel and the old solicitor were strolling in the orchard. How blessed was the composure of this solemn morn! Two young, innocent, and happy creatures were about to enter on the paths of a new life. Some troubles must attend those paths—many might infest them; but when Lucy and Ruth appeared in their white bridal dresses, simple as simple might be, yet not without their appropriate ornaments, the hearts of their parents burned within them, and all the future seemed full of sunshine. Michael would fain have beheld his Lucy—grateful would he have been to Heaven for one glimpse of vision—but that was a transient wish of exceeding love, and, kissing her cheek as she sat on the same chair, her blind father was satisfied.

The marriage-party were just about to leave the Vicarage, when all the dogs about the place—no small number—including several nondescripts belonging to the solicitor, set up a barking, that was answered by a general caw from the rooks on the Elm Grove. The narrow avenue, or approach, was not formed for such splendid equipage as that which now appeared at the gallop. The kine stared

and wondered from beyond the high stone wall, or scampered off unwieldily in distant imitation of the motions of the four beautiful blood-horses that wafted along the Lady of the Hirst; while wide-open eyes, from kitchen, byre, and barn door, devoured the miraculous spectacle. A stronger sensation could not have been produced by the descent of the grand coronation balloon.

The Lady of the Hirst, now no more Emma Cranstoun, descended gracefully from her carriage, assisted by her husband, Edward Ellis, and embraced Lucy Forester. Lucy had written to her as soon as she had fixed her marriage-day; and the lady, being on her own bridal tour, had come to grace the nuptials. But no time was to be lost; for the chapel bell, so calm and clear was the atmosphere, was absolutely heard tinkling with joy far away up the glen; not a few flags were seen raised up over the tops of cottages, in honour, probably, of the gallant captain; and now and then was heard a discharge of small artillery, borrowed for the occasion from Bowness and Lowood, whose tourists, for one day, would be cheated out of their somewhat extravagant echoes. The Lady of the Hirst—for so let her still be called—took her beloved Lucy into her landau, along with her bridesmaid, Ellinor of Rydal, and meek Mary Morrison, the faithful and affectionate, whom she had recognised and saluted with her most gracious smiles. Other vehicles, neat enough in their way, formed in the rear; and although the road to the chapel was rather rough and angular, and at many turns seemingly shut up by old ivied pollard stumps, or moss-grown walls, built up, cairn-like, of stones cleared from the fields they enclosed, yet the chapel was soon gained in safety, and in about one hour Lucy and Ruth returned to the Vicarage, as Mrs Colinson of Oldfield, Ellesmere, and Mrs Marshall of Seathwaite Hall, Ullswater.

Two or three hours of quiet converse passed away, during which Miles Colinson cheerfully resigned his Lucy to the Lady of the Hirst; but as it was not a very short, and by no means a very level road to Seathwaite Hall, over Kirkston and Place Fell, an entertainment which, in deference and respect to the fashionable world, let be called a *Dejeune a la fourchette*, was with no delay spread below the yew-tree. The vicar's wife and Agnes sat together at the head—the vicar and Michael Forester at the foot of the table. The blushing Lucy and Ruth were seated beside their respective bridesmaids; and Mary Morrison was not far from the side of her who was dearest and kindest on the earth to that widow and orphan. The bridegrooms assumed already a somewhat important air, and endeavoured to seem as becomingly composed as Edward Ellis, who was now quite an old married man; for the beauty of his bride had disturbed the Sabbath devotion of two congregations—one in town, and the other in country. Uncle Brathwaite and Aunt Isobel were the merriest of the company.

But who were those three humble-looking persons entering the gate, while a young woman advanced a little before the others, with familiar but not obtrusive steps, towards the Vicarage? "Good heavens!" cried Mary Morrison, "can that be Martha, and Hamish,

and Flora Fraser!" It was so indeed—and Martha had an infant at her bosom! The emigrants had returned from Canada; but old Donald Fraser was not with them: they had left his bones in a burial-place in the woods. Martha soon told her story. The brother whom Donald had gone to visit, had died soon after the old soldier, and left property to Hamish and Flora worth nearly three hundred pounds. With such a sum they resolved to return to their dear Highlands; and having landed at Liverpool, Martha could not think of passing on to Scotland without stepping aside for a day to see the old people with whom she had formerly lived, and her friends at the Vicarage. Had such a meeting as this been described in a novel, it would no doubt have been criticised as too improbable; but Martha and Lucy had each her own romance of real life, and thus far it had been, although sometimes a little dim or dark, on the whole not undelightful. Martha was happy at the thought of passing her days in the Highlands, somewhere in the Glen of Dee, or in Glen Tilt, or on the banks of the Bruar, or by the waterfalls of the Tummel, or the sylvan shores of Loch Rannoch. Those names she pronounced readily, and even with something of a Highland accent—for her husband Hamish had taught her some Gaelic, and in that language she now hushed her little Canadian, awaking from his dream in her bosom.

The Lady of the Hirst bade them all farewell, not without Miles Colinson's promise to bring his wife to Holylee next summer. Captain Marshall bore off his Ruth in triumph; and Miles and Lucy, attended by Mary Morrison, had walked away unnoticed to their own house at Oldfield. The emigrants were most welcome indeed at the Vicarage, in the silence of that evening. Martha had not a little to tell, and Aunt Isobel did not let her rest a minute, with questions put half in kindness and half in curiosity—since the old lady, in the perfect satisfaction of her spirit, could afford to forget her Lucy, and keenly interest herself about Martha's past and future concerns; for short as her time was now to be in this world, she still regarded those whose term there might be a prolonged one, with the unabated warmth of a heart that could be made cold only in the grave.

As for Michael and Agnes, they retired that evening sooner than usual to their own room. They had not lost a daughter, but they had found a son. Should Providence permit, the families at Oldfield and Bracken Braes were to visit each other year about; and to that Providence, whatever might be its decrees, they knelt down in prayer as happy as any of its creatures below heaven.

END OF VOL. XI.

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